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Big Tremainie

Marie Van Vorst

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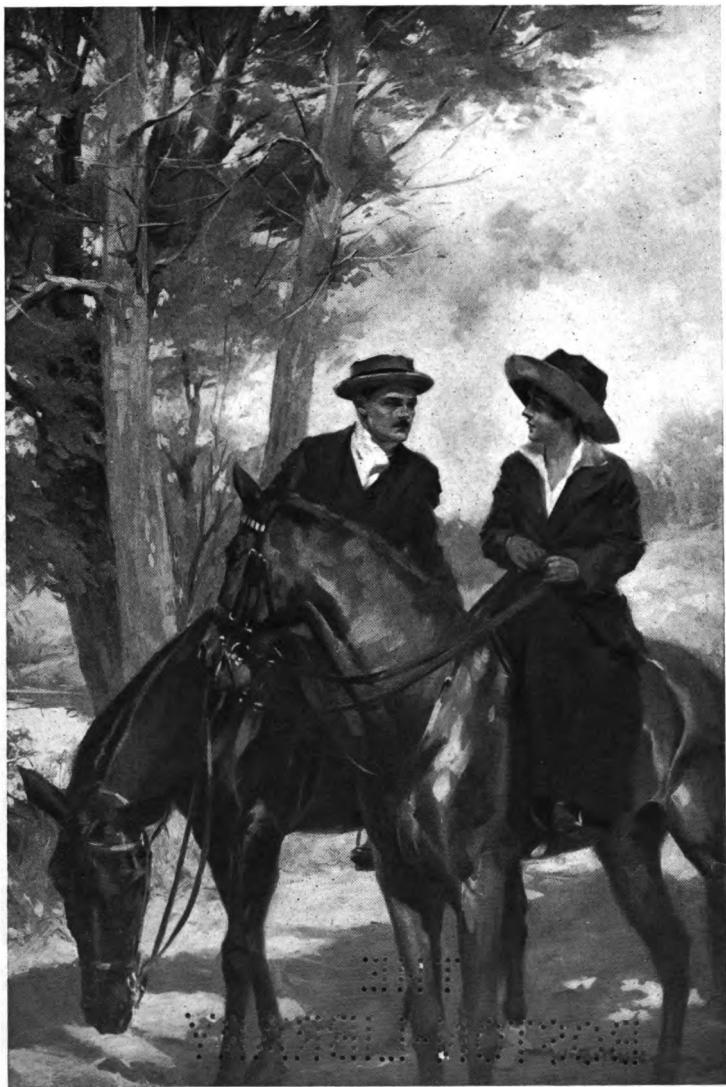
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BIG TREMAINE

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They halted their horses in the sandy road by the river bank. FRONTISPIECE. See Page 148

BIG TREMAINE

A NOVEL

BY

MARIE VAN VORST

AUTHOR OF "THE GIRL FROM HIS TOWN," ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

W. B. KING



BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

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1914

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Published, September, 1914.

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Printers

B. J. PARKHILL & CO., BOSTON, U.S.A.

To
Victor Morawetz

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
WITH AFFECTIONATE REGARDS

Cannes, 1910—New York, 1914

BIG TREMAINE

CHAPTER I

HE stood by the fence, looking toward the west, toward the river and red clay banks, toward the lower pasture glowing in the sunset, and he asked himself whether this old white house, its windows flashing in the setting sun, could be the impressive residence he had pictured in his dreams of home during his fifteen years' absence from Virginia. The paint on the house was cracked and yellow, the pillars of the verandah sagged and leaned, the roofs were patched and faded; the neglected place had all the melancholy of a forsaken nest. The live oaks, too, as he looked at them, now seemed to dwindle. No wonder that in boyhood he had been able to climb them all! Not even a bird call broke the summer silence, and the receding light growing paler crept slowly from fields and meadows.

The windows darkened and the river banks in the distance faded in the twilight. The traveler waited until in the upper story a light passed from window to window, and he knew by this that the house was occupied. Then he turned to the road by which he had come from the station, and striking the highway walked briskly toward the town.

When later he knocked at the door of a lawyer's office in the town hall building, the light which the sunset had shed over his face had died. The office boy bade him wait; he would call Mr. Leavitt, who was still in the building owing to extra business which had kept him beyond the usual hour.

The visitor took a chair and looked interestedly about the room. His head, uncovered, was dark, his thick hair straight as an Indian's, and as black. A lock of it fell across his forehead, and with an impatient gesture he brushed it away. His eyes were grayish blue, very gray at times, very blue at others, under level black brows. On the wall over the desk was posted a printed notice: "To be sold at public auction, on the tenth of June, the property known as the Tremaine Estate."

He read the bill attentively, and Mr. Samuel Leavitt when he came in found his visitor gazing at the auction advertisement.

The stranger rose, gravely extending his long, brown hand, and in a voice, which had the suggestion of an English accent, said:

"Good-evening. You don't remember me."

Leavitt looked the man up and down and shook his head; then ventured cautiously:

"No—yes—I have seen you somewhere, I reckon!"

The stranger pushed the hair from his forehead.

"Look hard—look back. Look back fifteen years."

The lawyer thrust his hands in his pockets.

"John Tremaine."

A change came over Leavitt's face, and Tremaine, watching him, smiled cynically, as though the lawyer had given way to just the emotion he had expected from him. He nodded.

"Yes, I am John Tremaine."

Leavitt now frankly stared with the keenest curiosity. Nothing could have surprised him more. He had supposed John Tremaine to be dead; he had hoped that he *was* dead—or he would have so hoped had he not been one of the kindest souls on the face of the earth. There was scarcely a citizen in the town of Redlands who had not heard ugly rumors regarding the youngest of the Tremaines. There were all sorts of tales about the wanderer who had left Virginia fifteen years ago and since then had given no sign of life.

If there had been hesitation in the mind of the older man as to how to greet this scapegrace, that hesitation seemed to have passed. He said courteously: "I am surprised to see you, sir. You have been gone a lifetime."

The stranger smiled.

"I don't doubt that you are surprised, Leavitt," he said, then asked sharply, "What has happened to every one in fifteen years?"

Leavitt, who had transacted the Tremaine business for more than a quarter of a century, answered coldly:

"What interest has Redlands for you, sir?"

Tremaine, who had risen, took his chair again and fell into a comfortable attitude, his long figure stretched

out. Leavitt glanced him up and down. Tremaine's tone was short.

"My dear man, what do you care whether or not Redlands interests me? Redlands probably is as indifferent to me as I am to Redlands."

"I never," said the lawyer, "expected to see you in Virginia again, John."

"No?" Tremaine nodded. "Isn't it more agreeable to stay away from a place of which one has bitter memories?"

The lawyer leaned forward and stared at him as though at an unreal being.

"You do not ask of your mother!"

The visitor said shortly: "I did ask the news."

And Leavitt repeated impressively:

"Your own mother, sir, after fifteen years."

Tremaine stirred in his chair.

"She is living in the old home," said Leavitt sharply. "She goes North to Julia Tremaine next week."

John nodded, dryly. "To my brother's widow."

"David died last year," said Leavitt.

John's dark eyes, as he fastened them on Leavitt, seemed possessed of a power to read men.

"I learned that bit of news just as I had decided to leave for Virginia. . . . He died one year too soon."

"Your life hasn't softened you, John."

"Life," said the wanderer, "doesn't always soften.
. . . David died too soon."

"His mother thinks so," said Leavitt. "It nearly broke her heart."

"And his wife?" asked the traveler. "Did it break her heart too?"

Leavitt turned to him sharply. "You are too great a stranger, sir, for me to discuss these things with you."

Tremaine lifted his eyes to the wall where the advertisement of the sale of Riverside hung. He pointed to it with his stick.

Leavitt felt like striking the indifferent dark man, whose disgrace was known to him, and whose unnatural coldness shocked his finest fibre.

"One scapegrace was enough in the family, wasn't it, Leavitt?" Tremaine said with a smile. "David must have been a great satisfaction to my mother."

Leavitt saw what a magnificently set up man he was; spare, muscular, with force written in every line. The lawyer was full of curiosity about this man: where had he been—what had he done? But he could not have questioned him for anything in the world.

Looking at the cigarette which he had lighted and turned between his fingers, Tremaine asked suddenly:

"Have you ever made a study of the history of black sheep, Leavitt?"

Leavitt shrugged. "They have never interested me, sir."

"Such histories are all rather similar, eh? Death in a far-off land, nameless graves, or the theatrical return with the bags of gold. What, Leavitt?"

There was reproach in the face of the lawyer at the light indifferent tone. He knew the disgrace that this man had brought upon his family ; he knew the wounds that fifteen years of absence had not healed.

Tremaine said : " You see I didn't die. I came back ; and I didn't come to exhibit a failure before the eyes of my fellow citizens. I have brought back the bags of gold."

Leavitt waited.

" Many bags of gold," the stranger said coolly. " If I had not been stacking them up pretty successfully, I never should have returned ! I am a rich man," he added in a sarcastic tone. " Doesn't the news interest you ? "

Money, the making of it, the possession of it, even the mention of it, was foreign to this poor Southern gentleman. It was the last thing in the world that interested him, although he had felt its need keenly enough. He exclaimed with feeling :

" I never understood you, John, as a boy ; I certainly do not understand you now."

Leaning forward a little in his chair Tremaine tapped Leavitt's table with his stick.

" Yet you once liked me, confess it."

The lawyer did not seem to hear this.

" You left Redlands fifteen years ago, John, in profound disgrace ! "

Tremaine moved in his chair, his face darkened, and he repeated in a low tone : " In profound disgrace ! " He seemed to wish to impress the words upon himself.

"Yes," continued Leavitt, "you ran away from here because——" He paused; the words were not easy to frame.

"Because I was a thief?" interrupted Tremaine. "I'm very curious," he continued, "to hear just what was told you. You don't object to repeating the story as it came to you?"

"You must be devoid of all sensitive feeling, sir," the lawyer exclaimed, "or you would not ask such a question."

Tremaine smiled. "In a hand-to-hand fight with life during fifteen years sensitive feelings dull. If ever I was a man of feeling, I have become a man of action. It would interest me deeply to hear what you were told."

Leavitt leaned forward to him, almost arrogantly.

"Since you will have it, sir, you'd been taken into the Redlands National Bank that summer and were sent by the president, Mr. Malvern, to Richmond to cash a check for ten thousand dollars and to fetch the money in notes back to the bank here. Is that correct?"

"Quite correct." Tremaine nodded his head.

Leavitt paused, took out his handkerchief and wiped his lips. As he spoke, the scene which had taken place in his office fifteen years ago came up before his eyes. He saw Mrs. Tremaine as she had waited with David in this very office to tell him of the family's disgrace. How he had loved her then! How he had loved her ever since!

"You never returned from Richmond. You ran away with the stolen money and you broke your mother's heart!"

Tremaine was silent a few moments and then said abruptly:

"With this charming reputation waiting for me in my own home, you can readily understand why I have not returned before."

"I am surprised that you *ever* returned," said the lawyer coldly.

Tremaine laughed. "I came to fetch back the bags of gold."

"What do you mean?"

Tremaine spoke more agreeably.

"Virginia has not occupied herself with me—indeed, why should it?—but I have kept myself informed as far as was possible at a distance of eight thousand miles." He glanced up at the wall where the sign hung. "I have learned of my mother's financial straits. I do not know that she has ever needed me in fifteen years, but I am inclined to think that I may be of some service now." He changed the subject abruptly, rose and said nonchalantly, as though he were speaking of an entire stranger: "Since you tell me she is at home, I'll go to see her." Then he asked with genuine feeling: "Is Mammy alive?"

"Yes."

"By Jove, *she'll* be surprised after all these years?"

A faint tenderness passed over his face, but it was hidden at once by the mask of indifference. He took

up his hat and stick, paused at the threshold of the door, lit a fresh cigarette, and as he flung down the match, nodded back at the lawyer, who watched him from his chair.

"I'll be in to-morrow morning. Good night."

Leavitt took off his glasses and wiped them, replaced them and stared at the open door through which the youngest Tremaine had disappeared.

CHAPTER II

It was scarcely dark and the night was peaceful and still as Tremaine came slowly up the front steps of the house, to wait a few moments before going in. He had tramped about for an hour after leaving Leavitt. After an absence of fifteen years, he thought he might take his time! The lights in the windows had multiplied.

How would his mother greet him?

His face was hard. From an open window in an upper story, he heard the sound of a mellow negro voice. The pathos, the tenderness, came down to Tremaine where he stood listening :

“ Hard times, hard times,
Come again no mo’.
Many times you have lingered
Aroun’ my cabin do’.
Hard times, hard times,
Come again no mo’.”

The song stirred his childhood memories, a black face seemed to smile at him, and Mammy’s voice again sang him to sleep in his boyhood’s room. There was no light in that room to-night.

“I mustn’t startle Mammy ——” and he thought, “I should have sent them some word.”

The door opened and an old colored woman stood there in the dim light. She appeared to have grown little older and was just as he remembered her. Her silver-rimmed spectacles rode her broad black forehead under her bandana.

He said : " Come out a bit on the gallery, will you ? I have a message from Mrs. Tremaine's son, from John Tremaine."

" Ma lawd !" she breathed, with feeling, and came quickly out to the porch. From upstairs a voice called authoritatively :

" What is the matter, Mammy ? "

Tremaine put his fingers on his lips and the negress answered reassuringly :

" Nottin' 'tall, Mis' Molly, nottin' 'tall. Be thar dreckly," and then she shut the door.

He stood under the vine-covered porch, each breath of the honeysuckle bringing its vivid memories. The light from the parlor window fell full on him, but the negro woman did not recognize the stranger.

" News from Marse John ? " She put on her silver-rimmed glasses. " We ain't hyard from *him* in fifteen years."

The stranger's commanding height was like her old master's—Colonel Tremaine.

" Doan yo' go fur to tell me Marse John's dayde . . . "

Before he could reply, she ran back to the vestibule and called :

" Ya-as ma'am, Mis' Molly. Be thar dreckly, Mis' Molly. Doan yo' ketch cold on them stairs."

"Wouldn't that be the best news that I could bring to you—that he was dead?"

"Doan yo' say dat to *me*," the old voice trembled. "I'se his mammy."

Tremaine shivered; her tone was thrilling; she had nursed him. He spoke more naturally.

"He's not dead. He does not wish to startle you by sudden news." He took off his hat and threw back his hair. "Mammy!"

She looked up at him as he stood smiling on her, bending a little from his height. She peered up at him, eager, silent; her black face lit by her fine eyes shining behind her big spectacles. He held out his hand.

"Ma lawd, ma lawd!" whispered the old creature. "Ma honey chile, ma little Marse John!"

He stooped and kissed her with moisture in her eyes.

"Now don't startle my mother. Go back indoors; I'll follow you into the parlor. Tell her gently."

She was holding his hand between both her own, speechless with the excitement of this return and the knowledge that there was much against him here and that his welcome from his mother would be cold.

"Marse John, sho's yo' bawn!" she murmured, and added feverishly: "Praise de Lawd!"

In the parlor where he waited, the lamplight fell softly on familiar things. The meeting with Mammy had moved him deeply, and he was nursing a hope that his mother would greet him kindly. Over the

chimney hung the stuffed head of a stag, which he had shot as a boy ; he was surprised that they should have kept one of his treasures. The furniture was faded and in bad repair ; things had been running down steadily for many years, but the room was homelike and sweet. On the table, beside the lamp, lay his mother's work, as she had lately left it, and on a table was a chess-board with the men still in place. He wondered who played with his mother ? Overhead he heard steps moving to and fro in an upper room, and she kept him waiting so long that he wondered whether she would ever appear. Evidently she did not wish to see him. Yet she could not refuse to see her own son ! His brow contracted ; his face, which had been softened by the meeting with Chloe, grew hard and dark. Then hearing the rustle of a dress he started and turned ; his mother was in the room.

" Mother ! "

Mrs. Tremaine did not come forward at once. She stood in the doorway, pale as the white scarf that fell across her breast. He saw that she had still preserved much of her beauty and all of her pride. Her dark hair was only slightly gray. Her eyes, handsome as his own, met his firmly.

" This is a great surprise, John, a great surprise ; " her voice shook. " Mammy says that she knew you at once. "

His height, his shoulders were like his father's ; his dignity of bearing was like her own. Any woman would have been proud to have him for her son. What

had brought him to Virginia after fifteen years? He had no doubt returned poor, and with her own financial difficulties she would be called upon to bear her son's burdens also.

"Won't you sit down, Jehn? Have you come from far?"

However she might feel toward him, the man was proud of his mother, delighted with her beauty and proud of her breeding. He had dreaded to see a decided change in her and he found her to be young as were his memories of her.

"I have come from South Africa, mother, rather far, isn't it?" He took a chair under the lamplight, which shone full on his face.

The year before she had lost her idol in the death of her elder son, and she had said then: "Blessed are those women who have never borne a child." John—probably leading a dishonorable life, perhaps, dead,—had really been dead to her since that night when she learned how he had disgraced his name. David was gone from her forever, and now in his stead her younger son stood before her in flesh and blood. It was a strange exchange.

"I saw Leavitt an hour ago. He too was surprised."

She said, rather uncertainly:

"He has been an invaluable friend," and added: "I am going North next Monday to Julia."

"So he tells me."

Throughout the country his name was a bad memory. Her relationship with her old friend and neighbor Red-

mond Malvern, aforetime president of the Redlands National Bank, was strained because she was the mother of a thief. Nevertheless she could not look at John who sat there so quietly, his dark eyes fixed upon her, without a tremendous stirring of her heart. This was her own son and after fifteen years of a life whose vicissitudes were a mystery to her, he sat by her side again, given back to her as if from the grave.

John rose, saying :

"It is growing late. I shall look in to-morrow, mother."

She started from her reverie.

"What do you mean?"

"I will find a room at the tavern."

"You don't think, do you, that a Tremaine will be allowed to sleep at the hotel while his own roof stands? Mammy is preparing your room."

It was not a cordial invitation, and a flush rose under his dark skin. He was very handsome as he raised his eyes to her.

"Thank you, I shall be glad to stay."

Mammy Chloe came in with a lighted candle.

"De room's all ready, Marse John; done fixed up bes' I could, honey. Ain't no new tings in dis hyar old place."

"Mammy will light you. Where is your luggage?"

"Why, I left my bags at the hotel. I walked up by way of the town, saw Leavitt, and ——"

"You have adopted strange customs abroad,—you

left your luggage in an inn! What will Redlands think?"

He saw that he had offended her.

"They will think nothing. No one knows who I am."

"Nonsense! Not know you? A figure like yours in Redlands?"

And he thought that it annoyed her that he should possess the Tremaine characteristics.

"I'll have my traps fetched at once."

He followed the colored woman out into the hall and up the stairs.

"'Tain't your own bayde, Marse John, reckon you couldn't straitch out dem long shanks, but it's de same old room, sho' nuff."

Meagre, scantily furnished, it extended its four walls to him, and through the open window he saw the summer night and the stars. He put both his hands on the shoulders of the old negress and looked at her without speaking.

"Sho', Marse John, doan yo' car, chile: she doan mean one little bitty of it."

He turned and went over to the window and sat down on the ledge. He felt for a cigarette.

"Whom shall I offend by smoking, Mammy?" He struck a match and lit his cigarette.

"Marse John," said the old woman, "she-all's had a powerful lot ob trubble." He made no response. "Kind dat eats yo' heart up . . . chaws it all up inside."

"The heart's gone, Mammy, that's true."

"She's grievin' 'bout de ole place, Marse John." He smiled. "'Pears like her life's ackshually boun' up in Vahginia in de ole home an' farm."

He heard the tree-toads singing and remembered how sweet their voices had sounded to him when he was a boy.

"She's a real ole Southern lady, bawn hyar an' her folks befo' her, clar down befo' de wah. She ain't got no foot fo' de Nawf. She's grievin' . . ." A voice called "Mammy."

"Ya-as, ma'am, Mis' Molly."

He leaned out of the open window and heard the whippoorwill call. Near by and far off, the plaintive voice pierced the darkness, and John remembered the wild note blending with his troubles long ago.

Between himself and his older brother David was a difference of five years. They had never been companions, and as far as he could recall, no one had ever spoken to John except to reprove him. His father had lost his fortune about the time John had been born, and from then on sank into the melancholy in which he died. Between his father and mother John remembered only the coldest relations, and the only love he could recall was that of Mrs. Tremaine for David and of Mammy for himself.

Walking to and fro in his small room, he relived the memories of his hard young years. They were poignant; their voices would not be hushed. As he reflected, he would have been glad to recall one kindly act, one word, one caress from them to soften his heart.

Throughout his childhood his mother had ignored him, and in the supreme moment when he had needed her mercy, she had heaped upon him only reproach and shame.

The part of the property known as the Back Pasture, lying tranquil under the June moonlight, had been the place of his meeting with the girl he loved. Standing in the window, he looked down once again on the scene he had so often pictured in his exile. In those days he had thought himself the luckiest chap in the State and the most passionately in love. Julia Cameron, a lovely Northern girl whose family passed the winters in the South, had come as a visitor to one of the near-by country houses. Both David and John had fallen in love with her, and it had been balm to the younger brother, until that time always put aside for David, to find himself the preferred. Julia had promised to marry him. His ambitions then took form. He would become a bank president some day, but in the meantime—having no fortune and receiving only a very small salary—Julia would wait for him.

Then, little by little, John had seen Julia's favor go to David. The bitterness, the blinding misery when he knew the truth, had almost driven him to violence.

There were scars on his heart that never could be fully effaced. He had grown bitter toward women, and he thought them all fickle and treacherous.

The old homestead settled to repose. Walking to and fro in his little room, he felt himself more than

ever an exile. The single gentle thing about his return had been Mammy's greeting.

"I will wind the affair up," he said to himself, "in as short a time as possible and then return to South Africa. Whatever my birthright was, I lost it years ago."

He had his supper alone; his mother, utterly overcome by the shock of his return, remained in her room.

About ten o'clock, Mammy came shuffling back to his door and said through the aperture:

"Po' white trash fella astin' to see yo', Marse John. He-all got yo' baigs."

Tremaine opened the door.

"Come in, Mammy."

The face of the old negress was a study as she entered, followed by a spruce, red-headed Irishman carrying a heavy bag on his shoulder and another in his hand. The man was warm and breathless. He placed the bags on the floor and stood at attention in military fashion, his fine blue eyes twinkling.

"Be the powers, yer Honor," he said in a rich brogue, "the desert is a daisy field beside the roads 'twixt here and the town."

He did not even wipe the perspiration from his face as he stood stiffly, waiting his master's orders. The negress, whose lips were working tremulously and whose eyes were filling with tears, went up to Tremaine and laid an old hand on his arm.

"Am he gwine to be yo' nigger, Marse John?"

The Irishman exclaimed in spite of himself :

"Nigger, is it? Oh, Lord!"

"Am he gwine to darn yo' socks an' bresh yo' close, honey? Am he?"

Tremaine covered the black hand with his own. No one who heard his voice when he spoke to the old woman would have known him for the man, who, according to the newspapers, had punished a native company with death for insubordination, and who had a reputation for being, when he chose, overbearing and even cruel.

"Mammy, this is John Nolan. He is an Irish soldier. He left his career to follow me and to serve me. Make him welcome. Remember he is a stranger."

Mammy's face had hardened under the jealousy and distress which she made no effort to hide, and it was savage in its expression as she lifted it, black as ebony, to her master. Tremaine glanced from her to the Irishman who stood quietly, amusement in his blue eyes.

"Nolan," said Tremaine sharply, "tell her about Wahu."

Nolan passed his sleeve across his brow.

"Beggin' yer pardon, yer Honor, it's that warm, the heart of Africa's a snowstorm to Virginia."

"Listen, Mammy," said John, and turned the woman around forcibly until she faced the Irishman.

Nolan addressed her cordially.

"It was of a June mornin', mother——"

Chloe advanced her head and her eyes shot fire.

"I ain't yo' mudder, yo' good fo' nottin' . . ."

"Hush!" said her master sternly.

"Of a June mornin', as hot as—hereabouts," said the Irishman, and chuckled. "Me and some b'ys were riding for our health across the little bit of sand called . . ."

"Cut out the geography, Nolan," said his master.

Nolan saluted. "Yes, yer Honor. We was riding to beat the divvil across the Wahu district, where good b'ys should never ride, as your Honor knows . . ."

"Tell your story to her, Nolan."

"As his Honor knows, Miss . . ."

Chloe nodded at him. "I'se a marr'ed woman; doan yo' go fo' to 'miss' me. Bin marr'ed three times and a half, yo' . . ."

Nolan continued serenely:

"All of a sudden, we comes up to a ditch where a horse's hufs had been beatin' the sand around like blazes." Nolan stopped and shrugged his shoulders. "Beggin' yer Honor's pardon, I forget the rest."

"Mammy," said the traveler, "I will finish the story for him. It was a wild country and they were among savage enemies. The soldiers were far from their camp. Nolan got off his horse and looked down into the ditch. A man was lying there where he had fallen from sun-stroke; his horse had left him, and half dead with the heat and exposure and a broken leg, the man was waiting for death. The other fellows, frightened by the appearance in the distance of a troop of natives, took to their heels and rode back to camp like mad; but this Irishman here climbed down into the ditch

and dragged the sick man up the bank, got him on to his own horse, and rode with him back to safety under the fire of the native soldiers."

He looked into Chloe's eyes. "You understand, Mammy?"

But the attention of the negress had never left the Irishman's face. Her chin dropped slowly, the hate had passed away, but her usual placid sweetness had not yet returned. She asked tremulously of Nolan:

"Who-all was de fella' on de groun'?"

"Shure," said the Irishman, "wasn't it himself?"

The negress stiffened herself. The tears which started to her eyes she winked away, the lines of her face softened, and with a dignity that had a sort of majesty in it, she went up to the Irishman and in a voice whose very mellifluousness showed the self-control she was exercising, she said:

"An' yo' kin lay his stockings in de bottom drawer an' his shirts on de shelf in de clawset. Rig him up bes' yo' kin fo' to-night. An' come downstairs in de kitchen, an' Mammy'll give yo' a mint julep fo' yo' go ter baid."

The Irishman saluted, and Mammy sailed out of the door like a dusky queen.

CHAPTER III

LEAVITT waited in his office till past noon for John Tremaine's promised visit, and then, unable longer to control his interest and curiosity, went up to the homestead. His visits to Mrs. Tremaine were usually the most peaceful of errands, and never had he been so stirred or excited as now. He left his straw hat and stick in the hall and found Mrs. Tremaine embroidering, seated in the window through which she could see what had once been a beautiful avenue, but was now nothing but a grassy lane over whose greenness fell the shadow of fine old trees.

Mrs. Tremaine called Mammy to fetch the guest a mint julep, and Leavitt, bright with excitement, seated himself in his accustomed place.

"My dear Molly," he began, in his soft Southern voice, "dear lady, I certainly did think that the skies had fallen last night when John walked into my office."

He was watching her face, as he watched it always when with her, for every sign of interest or emotion, and more often he saw anxiety than joy. Mrs. Tremaine had no intention of displaying to Leavitt the state of disarray in which she found her feelings. She returned quietly :

"Mammy knew John directly, so she said ; but of

course she'd say that. These negro women think they would know the child they nursed under a mask."

"I knew him almost instantly," said Leavitt eagerly. "I would have known him anywhere. He is a true Tremaine."

Mrs. Tremaine returned with spirit:

"I think he looks more like me."

And indeed she resembled her son as she spoke, raising her fine eyes to Leavitt. He understood her, and thought it noble in her so quickly to claim resemblance with this disgraced son in order to shield the Tremaines.

Mammy fetched in the mint julep.

"G'd evenin', sah, Mistah Lebbit. Yo' seen mah boy? Yo' seen mah great big Marse John? Ain' he de royallest gemmen yo' suttinly ebbeh did see, Mistah Lebbit?"

"Mammy," said Mrs. Tremaine, "don't stand there and chatter."

"Ya-as, ma'am, Mis' Molly," and somewhat discomfited, Chloe made her exit, rustling in her stiff starched frock.

"I waited for John until just now," continued the lawyer. "He said he would come back. He seemed very much interested in Riverside."

Mrs. Tremaine continued to embroider, her eyes upon her work. Leavitt felt disappointed when he saw that she did not intend to discuss her son and it wounded him to think that she was not prepared to give him her confidence. In spite of himself, he exclaimed rather sharply:

"What the devil has he been doing these fifteen years?"

John heard this question as he entered the room.

"Good morning, Leavitt," he nodded. "I can answer that question better than the next man, can't I?"

He stood by the mantel, before the empty fireplace, the stag's head above him.

"Really, you know," he said rather unpleasantly, "all men's lives are adventures. I dare say the history of the commonest citizen in Redlands would be interesting were it written truthfully. Now David's life no doubt was more exciting than mine."

The lawyer finished his mint julep at one draught, wiped his lips, adjusted his glasses nervously, and glanced at Mrs. Tremaine, in whose cheeks the color began to mount.

John felt in his pocket for a cigarette, recalled that his mother did not like him to smoke in the living-room, and holding the cigarette in his fingers, bent his eyes upon the two.

"Adventures," he said, and his voice was curt, "are only interesting when they are told to a sympathetic audience. We will postpone mine for another time, if you don't mind."

Leavitt caught his breath. He rose, but Mrs. Tremaine had folded up her work with trembling hands and shut her work-table.

"Will you excuse me, Sam?" she said formally. "I have many preparations to make before I go North."

Between John and Leavitt she passed out, stately and unbending. Her son's eyes softened as they followed her.

"By Gad, sir," Leavitt had begun angrily, but Tremaine put his hand on the older man's arm.

"I'm postponing my adventures, but not my business dealings. I'll go along with you to your office. Wait till I fetch my hat and stick and tell Mammy that I shall not be back for dinner."

John stood in the window of the lawyer's office, leaning against the casing. Down in the yard below the village boys were playing baseball. It appeared to amuse the stranger to watch them, and the most kindly expression that his face had worn crossed it as he listened to their cries of "first base" and "low ball." He appeared to forget that Leavitt, at his table, was waiting for him to open the conversation.

After a second, Tremaine turned brusquely.

"First of all, if not taking too much of your time—which, let me say, I shall be glad to pay for—I should like to ask a few questions."

"Sir!" exclaimed Leavitt violently.

John went on coolly:

"You were counsel for Malvern, for my people as well, when I left Virginia."

"I have been in your family's confidence for thirty years," said the lawyer. He had taken his revolving chair and leaned against the table. He was distinctly unfriendly to this curt individual, and his voice lost

something of its native gentleness as he leaned forward in his chair, fixing Tremaine through his highly polished glasses.

"You have spoken frankly of your disgrace," he said; "otherwise you may imagine I should not have been the first to refer to the past. Here in this very office we discussed together what had befallen your family. Your mother sat where I am sitting. David stood where you stand."

John moved suddenly from the place where he stood and came over toward the lawyer.

"David found means to make good what you had taken from the bank, and it was then that Malvern showed his friendship. It was an understood thing that never as long as he lived would the subject be mentioned again."

"Leavitt," said John intensely, "was the affair really known only to you four people?" A look of relief crossed his face when Leavitt answered:

"No one else ever knew."

Tremaine raised his eyes to the wall where the placard advertising the sale of Riverside hung.

"What are the liabilities on Riverside?" he asked.

Leavitt's hand moved among the papers on his desk.

"The mortgages amount to ninety thousand dollars, back taxes and interest figure up ten thousand more."

"Who holds the mortgages?"

"A first mortgage for sixty-five thousand dollars is held in Richmond," Leavitt answered, and after a mo-

ment's hesitation added : " I hold a second mortgage for the remainder."

An expression of brightness crossed Tremaine's face, and it came so unexpectedly that it had the effect of sunlight striking a rugged mountainside. Leavitt thought aloud :

" The property has gone to rack and ruin ; it would cost a mint of money to put it in order. No one will be fool enough to buy it for the amount of the mortgages."

" What shall you do with it ? "

Leavitt rubbed his glasses meditatively.

" Let old Mammy Chloe and her folks stay on the place and raise chickens and garden stuff." He smiled ; he did not wish to confess to this rich adventurer that he had loaned to Mrs. Tremaine all that he possessed, and that he expected to lose everything when the property was bid in by the holder of the first mortgage.

" Not a very brilliant investment on your part, Leavitt," Tremaine said quietly. " David let you bear this burden ? "

" He was not a rich man," said the lawyer, " and Julia will take care of his mother."

" True," nodded Tremaine, " I forgot that act of devotion." He drew a chair up to Leavitt's desk and sat down, his eyes on the printed bill. As he read the words, he saw before him the landscape which, whenever it crossed his mind in South Africa, gave him that strange homesickness, that soul sickness, which he had to crush down.

"I'm going to pay off the mortgages. Let me know the amount due—back interest, taxes, everything."

"You're joking!"

John laughed. "I can make better jokes than that," he said. "It doesn't seem especially humorous. You tell me yourself it is rack and ruin."

"It's dead wood," the lawyer exclaimed, "dead waste."

John laughed aloud. "Now you're the wit, Sam. You're arguing against your own interests." He tapped the table. "Draw me up some contract that will bind me until you can prepare the papers. Otherwise, with my charming reputation, you will not believe me."

"Why, what will you do with the property?" Leavitt asked.

"Turn it into a good investment," said Tremaine easily; "make it pay."

"Make it pay!" the Southern gentleman repeated the words in astonishment.

"Naturally," said Tremaine. "I mean just that. I have long since given up the questionable enjoyment of unprofitable things. Riverside shall pay, and pay me well."

Nothing had altered here, though the walls had grown grimmer and yellower; the old engravings hung crooked as they used to. The floor was dusty, and around Leavitt's chair were little piles of cigar ashes as he had let them fall. A green baize door behind the lawyer opened into an outside room where clients were

supposed to wait—the clients that Redlands knew never came. If Tremaine was a successful thief, Leavitt was a thoroughly unsuccessful lawyer. He had passed his life patiently, waiting for something that never came, and he was waiting still.

John, whose eyes were on him with a benevolence which Leavitt could not understand, thought to himself that if the years had not brought any great happiness to Leavitt, they had nevertheless dealt very kindly with him.

“Redmond Malvern is still president of the bank?” he asked, and glanced out of the window to the roof of the building known as the Redlands National Bank. He had been employed there, and he had been proud of the situation. His ambitions, his visions, had denied him nothing in those days. He had dreamed of being president of the bank and of running for Congress.

“No, Malvern gave up active business years ago,” said the lawyer. “He’s not engaged in any business now.”

Tremaine shrugged. “I shall have to see him, I suppose.” His face darkened. Claspings his hands together firmly, he raised his eyes to Leavitt and said coolly: “You will understand that I want to close up these matters as expeditiously as possible.”

“He certainly resembles Colonel Tremaine,” thought Leavitt. “The same brow, the same masterful way in which he gets hold of one’s eyes and keeps hold of one. How will he treat his mother?” Leavitt wished that he could protect her from this man’s harshness, as in the old days he had longed to protect her from her

husband. He desired to be near her when this dark, rude, forceful man went into that peaceful old house.

"I mean to say," Tremaine said, "that I want to do what I have come to Virginia to accomplish, in as quick a time as possible, and then clear out."

Leavitt's face brightened perceptibly.

"Then you haven't come to live in Virginia?"

John threw back his head and laughed aloud. Leavitt's face caused him keen amusement, and his words as well.

"Live in Virginia! My dear man, what do you take me for? You think I have exiled myself for fifteen years, a man without name or home, without any tie except the most fleeting ones and those most easily sundered—do you think I have lived like that to come back to a town where I am looked upon as an outcast and a thief?"

The expression of his face was not pleasant.

"I meet you, my old friend, a man I used to . . ."

He paused. Keeping his eyes fixed upon Leavitt, he continued with intention: . . . "a man I used to love as a boy—and your first thought when you greet me is: 'Here's the chap with the stain on his name back again! How shall we receive him? What will his mother say?' I must meet Malvern, the man who was my ideal when I was a lad. Perhaps he will refuse to shake my hand; if he doesn't, it will be for my mother's sake. I shall open an account with the bank, and he will wonder where that money came from."

The stranger ran his hand through his hair. "I go on

Main Street through the town ; traveling men are sitting on the porch of the hotel smoking and talking ; and some townsman will point me out to them : ' There goes John Tremaine, back from God knows where, after doing God knows what. He ran away from home fifteen years ago, and they say . . . ' " He made a gesture that had something of desperation in it. " What do they say ? I'm damned if I care ! But do you think I have been hungering to come back to run that gauntlet, Leavitt ? I wouldn't have remained away fifteen years if I had wanted to come home."

The face of the older man was a study quite as interesting as John's. As John spoke, Leavitt ceased to wonder what Mrs. Tremaine would think of him ; he was thinking of the man alone as he passionately spoke to him. He was the finest physical specimen Leavitt had seen in many years ; he combined the grace of his mother and his father's fire. The light of other lands had shed their charm upon him and their mystery. His face was expressive and full of magnetism ; he was a successful and wealthy man—evidently a man of force and power and used to authority. Primarily, he was born of a race of gentlemen, a clean race ; the best blood of the country ran in his veins. His voice was thrilling. Yet, because of what he had done in his youth, he was an outcast.

Leavitt involuntarily said, leaning forward :

" By God, it's too bad ! "

Tremaine laughed. " Now don't ask me again if I intend to live in Virginia, will you ? "

"But," said Leavitt, "you spoke very decidedly about making Riverside pay, and that will take time."

John shrugged. "I don't intend to leave to-morrow or the next day. I shall put the place in order for my mother, provide for her, and then return to South Africa."

"I understand," said Leavitt slowly, meditatively. He began to contrast with himself this cyclonic man who had mastered fate and circumstances for fifteen years. The mysterious, fascinating, adventurous life suddenly brought within these dingy walls transfigured the room for him.

"All I ask," Tremaine was saying, "is to see as little as possible of my townspeople—as little as possible of Malvern."

Leavitt looked up quickly, still dazzled by the traveler.

"And of me? As little as possible of me, John?"

There was nothing cordial in the man's voice as Tremaine replied:

"You will be my agent, my lawyer; we shall be obliged to see more or less of one another."

"As for Malvern," Leavitt said, "he is not about very often. He rarely comes into Redlands."

"All the better," said Tremaine. A few months since, in South Africa, he had stopped playing a game of pool in a hotel billiard room to listen to a man from Virginia, who talked to him about the American South, thinking he was an Englishman. He had heard familiar names again, and that night he had not slept,

for every now and then, through some trick of hearing, he seemed to listen to the plaintive note of the whip-poorwill as it used to call over the marshes of the river.

"Don't you remember little Isobel Malvern?" Leavitt was asking him, and John answered slowly :

"Of course I do: a funny little thing with freckles and blue eyes." He laughed. In a second he had grown absolutely human; he was another man, and the lawyer watched him keenly, as his armor of cynical indifference was put aside.

"A day or two before I ran away, I helped the little kid over the fence in the Back Pasture. She couldn't climb down and hung there crying. I wiped her eyes on my handkerchief; I think I kissed her before setting her down, and she ran away. Her Mammy found her."

He took his hat and stick from the table, and little by little that memory of childhood faded, and he became again the dark and inscrutable Tremaine.

"Isobel's grown up; she's twenty," said Leavitt.

John walked toward the door, and from there he made a graceful gesture toward the lawyer.

"I must go, and will you tell my mother that I have constituted myself a restorer of waste places?"

After John had gone, Leavitt still remained under the magnetic impression of his visit. It was an extraordinary return. Instantly, as always, his thoughts went to the woman; how would this return affect her? If John restored the place and made provision for his

mother, she would remain in Virginia. Leavitt, so thinking, blushed. Why, John's advent was a benediction then! As he thought this, he could not help feeling a glow of friendly feeling for Tremaine. Then the question put itself to him: How had he made this fortune? And again, what would the proud mother accept from a son who had been a thief? As a young man and a boy, he had preferred John to his brother. The younger son was a hunter, fond of sport and constantly in some scrape, but when the news of his crime was brought to Leavitt, the lawyer's first feeling had been that it could not be true. Here in this office he had received Mrs. Tremaine and David one hot June morning fifteen years ago. It was not difficult for Leavitt to bring to his mind the picture she made. She had sunk into a chair at his desk, and her hand in its silken glove had touched articles which henceforth became dear to him. Her beautiful features the more icily perfect for her pallor, she had sat immobile whilst David made a halting explanation of John's defalcation. Leavitt remembered the flush on young David's face and how he had admired the boy when he generously tried to palliate his brother's crime and gave up his little fortune to make restitution to the bank.

He remembered Mrs. Tremaine's adoration of this son, and her look as she turned upon him when he offered to replace the stolen money. Leavitt thought he understood the character of his proud friend and the thought came to him that she would refuse to accept anything from John and would not stay in Virginia

under the roof of a thief. Then began a warfare in his mind. Could he wish that she should remain under those circumstances, or was her very pride as dear to him as her presence here? He determined, however, that he himself would never accept a penny from John Tremaine until he knew how his money had been made.

A knock at the door made the lawyer look up. Pompey, his negro servant, stood there carrying a bouquet of gloire de Dijon roses in his hand.

"Leetle mite late, Marse Sam."

Leavitt took the flowers from his servant.

"I sure did stop to 'change a word wif Mammy."

The old man threw up his hands, and his white teeth gleamed.

"Her boy done come home!"

"Yes."

"Befo' de Lawd, Marse Sam, she's plumb crazy. She sure do say he's the finest gemmen in all de Souf. She's shoutin' 'Hallelujah, praise de Lawd,' Marse Sam."

This was how John's return affected one woman at Riverside—the black foster-mother.

"Lay out my evening clothes. I shall dine to-night at the Malverns'."

Leavitt rose, took his hat from the peg, readjusted himself at the little mirror over his table, frowned at his gray hairs and smoothed the wrinkles round his eyes.

Every day at five o'clock he took some of his flowers

to Mrs. Tremaine ; and now that she had planned to go North to Julia, every time he went with his offering he made it more fervently to his memories of thirty years. Already he saw the place desolate.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN walked homeward across the fields to the barns and stables, where he found doors open, chickens feeding in empty stalls, cobwebs hanging from the rafters and draping the old rockaway, which, rusty and splashed by mud, was the only relic of the carriages which in earlier days had furnished a complete stable.

On the carriage seat a hen was sitting. She fluttered out, cackling, leaving behind her a warm egg. A stir in the loft above him and a whistle made him look up, and through the opening in the rafters a darkey boy clad in blue overalls came down the ladder.

"I'se comin' right down, Mammy," he assured warmly, and dropping from the last rung, threw his straw hat on the floor, leaving his woolly head bare. He displayed his dazzling white teeth to Tremaine.

"Massa John! Massa John!" he exclaimed in a delicious drawl, "Ah reckon yo' doan know me!"

Tremaine smiled upon him with a cordiality that would have astonished Leavitt.

"You must be Mammy's grandson. You weren't born when I went away."

"Ma name's Robert E. Lee, sah," he informed cheerfully. "Gwine to stay home now, Massa John?" he asked with simple curiosity. "Ah sho' does hope yo'

is. Lemme be yo' boy, sah. Ah sho' do anythin' in the wide world for Massa John."

The young negro before him was a bundle of shiftlessness and raga. He told Tremaine that he must sure go out and hunt "aigs" or Mammy would "claw de wool off mah haid." Tremaine followed the boy into the hot sunshine of the stable yard, where dreary disuse met him everywhere. A bit of the stable roofing had fallen to the ground. Weeds grew thickly between the yard stones. From the window of the last stall a fat old horse stretched out his head, looking at John with mild, peaceful eyes. On his dirty back, in a broad bit of sunlight, sat a hen ruffling her feathers. The new proprietor called :

"Bob, when you get your eggs, come back here and clean this horse."

The boy put his head out from round the unhinged gate, swinging on one hinge.

"Yes, sah, Marse John, but ah sho' ain't got no comb, nor nuttin' 'tall for to clean old Hanny."

To the left of the barn was a hayrick, half in the warmth of the June sun and half in the shade of a chestnut. Tremaine saw a leg protruding from the hay, where, lying in an attitude of delicious indolence, his hands above his head, Tom Nolan lay asleep. John first frowned, then looked amused. The laziness of the South had gained even this brisk soldier. At the sharp calling of his name the Irishman sprang up without even brushing his eyes, accustomed as the soldier is to the rude breaking in upon his sleep.

"Beg your Honor's pardon," he said volubly. "It's a power of sleep I seem to need in this divvil of a place. What with the hens sleepin', and the niggers sleepin', it's a lonesome thing to be the only soul awake."

"Tom," said his master, drawing out his watch, "we came through Richmond. Do you remember?"

"Shure, I had the wing of a chicken there," said the Irishman, "when the engine broke down."

"There is a train in half an hour to Richmond," said his master. "Cut away and make it, will you? I want you to buy some horses."

Nolan had been confidential servant to his master for ten years.

"Buy a couple of farm horses, something for me to ride, and a pair of horses for my mother."

Nolan touched his forelock.

"Two of them can sleep under the spiders and cockroaches," he said, pointing with his thumb at the barn; "and the others will stand under the stars."

"There are six stalls," said Tremaine sharply.

"And a sixth of a roof to the barn," said the Irishman.

"You can stable the others in the town until that is bettered," said Tremaine. "Now get along with you. Don't let them 'do' you any more than you can help, and call me up on the telephone when you have made your deal."

"Wull I ride one of them home?" asked the Irishman, "or drive them, or what, yer Honor?"

"You can ship them," said John, "to morrow. And

when you've made your deal, look about for some suitable stable fixings. In short," he added, stopping before the door of the dilapidated barn, "by this time next week I want the roof on, and the stable in running order." He fixed his servant with his imperious command.

Nolan knew something of the fairy tales of his own land. It was bringing order out of chaos, at the touch of a wand. Also he had done things like this before. He settled his coat, brushed the hay off his clothes, and drew out from his pocket his soft cap, which he held in his hand. Tremaine took from his wallet a roll of bills, which he gave to the Irishman, telling him to call him up and inform him how the transaction proceeded.

"I have some doubts, yer Honor, if I can do the whole business in the matther of an afternoon."

"You can take it as a military order," said John, "and you know what that means."

With a smile he watched Nolan go smartly off down the path toward the highroad. Then he became conscious that during the conversation the nigger Bob had been standing wide-eyed at his side. John looked at him and laughed.

"You have got to work, my young man," he said. "Do you know what that means?"

"Ah sho' do," nodded the boy emphatically.

"You sure will," said his master.

The complete wreck of the place did not sadden him, because it suggested an occupation and the necessity for solving a problem. Although on all sides there

was neglect and wrong, there was as well the exuberance of the rich South, glorious in its early summer warmth. And beauty as well as decay rested over all. If there was old moss on the stones, there were luxuriant flowers, filling the meadows with their colors. There were arid places lying untilled, but they were rich with future harvests; and he knew that the soil was richer still with treasures that he longed to bring to light.

When late that afternoon, refreshed by a river bath, John came into the living-room, he found his mother sitting in a dejected manner in a chair by the window. She straightened herself as her son entered, and as soon as he had crossed the threshold he felt the old antagonism, the old disapproval. Leavitt had just left her, after telling her something of his conversation with her son.

John drew up a chair by her side.

"Leavitt has been here, mother, hasn't he?"

He understood that she had been told of his purpose to pay off the mortgages. On the table by her side Leavitt's roses had been arranged in a silver hunting-cup, and throughout the conversation he saw the flowers as a background for her head with its slightly silvered hair. She was pale, and her face seemed set against him like a marble face. He wondered how a woman could be so womanly and so lovely to look at, and so hard against her own. He waited for her to speak, and at length she said slowly: "Sam has told me"—and then paused. She had not dreamed it

would be so difficult for her to speak to John. He was more strange to her than a stranger.

But her son helped her, quietly.

"He told you that I am going to pay off debts and mortgages, and relieve Leavitt of his burden?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I did not think he felt it a burden."

"I'm sure he did not," said her son quickly, "but he is not a rich man. On our parts we should find it a burden to be indebted to him."

She had not yet fully met her son's eyes; she did so now. Her lips trembled in spite of her control.

"There are worse things," she said with an effort, "than being indebted to an old friend."

He inclined his head, accepting her reproach with extraordinary gentleness.

"You mean to say it would be worse to be indebted to a man with a stain on his name?" Then he said more quickly: "In this case you may be quite secure. I am well known in Johannesburg. South Africa knows me—they will give me a clean bill there. I don't doubt it will be a comfort for you to know that in South Africa I bear a stainless reputation. You may safely . . ."

She made a proud gesture as if to stop him. He could see that every word he said made her suffer.

"David told me that Riverside was a sink, a ruin. Every penny spent upon it was as good as lost in the sea."

"Wasn't that rather hard on Leavitt?" asked her younger son.

She brushed her hand across her eyes. She had never thought of the lawyer's sacrifice except in the light of a natural service from an old friend. John's motive in paying off the mortgages had been discussed by the two during Leavitt's visit. She now asked :

"You want to protect Sam ?"

He said shortly, after a second :

"No—for the sake of the family honor"—the words were out before he realized how oddly they would sound under the circumstances and he added—"I shall make the property pay."

She repeated the words much as Leavitt had done :

"Pay? You want to use the property then as an investment—a speculation ?"

He was aware how hard it would be to establish a basis between his mother and himself. A money-making scheme, a cold calculation on the part of an adventurer, would be unsympathetic to this proud Southern mother. He saw the color rise in her cheeks as she said with effort :

"You are a stranger to me, John ; I do not follow your meaning. Your way of doing things is strange to me."

She kept back tears that threatened to come, and studied her son's face. In spite of her hostility, she found him attractive and charming. But he was mistaken, in her judgment, in holding to a property which David had advised her to relinquish. Moreover, he stood there successful, living. She did not grudge him his life, but David was dead !

"Mother," he said quietly, "forget that I am a stranger. I have faith in the country hereabouts: I haven't much faith in human beings, but I have faith in material things. They pan out for us, they repay the trouble we give for them, and land itself has made me a rich man. Now I want to try my luck here. I had an idea, when I was a boy, that there was coal in this part of the State. If I prove right, I shall make another fortune here."

He watched her hopefully, eagerly. This was the first time in his life that he had laid his plans before a woman. Had Mrs. Tremaine realized this, she might have appreciated the moment more keenly. He bent forward in his chair and continued:

"I don't do this for myself. I've more than I need, more than I can use. I don't do it for Leavitt—or even for the pleasure of the game. I came back from Africa to redeem this property for you. I want it to be your home."

His voice and manner were compelling, he was magnetizing her in spite of herself. But at his last sentence she started, put up her slender hand in defence, and exclaimed in a low tone:

"Oh, no, no! I cannot accept!"

Manlike, he took her words as final, slightly raised his eyebrows, and then said:

"I shall purchase the property for myself then." He got up and standing beside her said earnestly, his hand outstretched: "Stay in Virginia: make your home here!"

He saw her shrink as she rose; she wanted to escape from this bewilderment, and as she started toward the door, her control nearly gone, she murmured:

"I'm going to Julia—I'm going to David's wife and his children."

She passed John. He shrugged his shoulders and his face darkened.

"As you like;" he opened the door for her, and as she went out, he exclaimed in spite of himself: "You speak of indebtedness! I should think you would prefer to be at home in your own house, rather than dependent on your daughter-in-law."

He found himself alone in the living-room. Not even on the South African plains had he felt more homeless and cynical than to-night. What a fool he had been to let the attraction of home beckon him! Why should he stay an hour under a roof where he was unwelcome and despised? Sitting there before his mother, he had hoped for a moment that, despite all obstacles, he might live down his reputation in Virginia and at last create for himself a home.

Mammy came in.

"'Scuse me, Marse John, honey, you ain't cryin'?"

He lifted up his head and smiled at her.

"Not quite crying, Mammy."

"De boys am hyar, an' dey 'lows dey's gwine to serenade yo'."

"Not to-night, Mammy; send them away."

"Dey'll be dreffle disappointed, honey. Dey sure do sing pretty music, Marse John."

Tremaine put his hand on her shoulder and pushed her gently toward the door.

"I couldn't bear it to-night, Mammy. Send them away."

She went, disappointed, but at the door turned to ask him whimsically :

"Whar's de bag of gole, honey? You allus 'lowed you'd brung me back a bag of gole. When you was a little feller, you ust to come and say : 'Gimme a cooky, Mammy, an' I'll fotch you back a bag of gole from treasure ilan.'"

"I've kept my word."

When she had gone, he took from the table a portfolio, which he had noticed the day before, and wondered if his mother had left it there purposely. It contained a collection of photographs of David Tremaine. The last one showed the young judge dressed in an English wig and gown. John lifted it and mused upon it in the familiar room, where the brothers had often met as enemies, and where now they never could meet again.

CHAPTER V

THE deeds of Riverside were finally signed, and the property made over to Tremaine, who became a land-owner in Virginia. His mother had insisted that he should take the title to the property, and it was bitter to find her unwilling to accept anything from him. He had come home early in June, and spent the first days riding about the country, examining his land and planning improvements. He had always believed that the district contained coal, and after securing the option on a large tract adjoining Blythe Mountain, he sent for experts to examine the land and to make borings. He had come back like a pioneer to conquer a new country, and he was backed by unlimited resources and an indomitable will.

He was master of the place, and since the night when his mother had, point-blank, refused to create a home for him, he never referred to the subject. He took up the reins of management and set his face toward his task. He realized that in a measure his presence was a trial to his mother; although he was the nearest being to her in the world, he was as well the greatest stranger. With a delicacy of which a woman might have been proud, he tried to understand her prejudices, and he carefully avoided those subjects which might offend her.

Impersonal, possessed of wide experience and—as day by day she acknowledged—much wisdom, he began to interest her, to absorb her in spite of herself. She found it hard to believe that she was the mother of this dark, foreign-looking man who had been part of other lives, a citizen of a continent whose very name lay like a shadow across her world. John's expression at times was so stern that it repelled her, and although his manners were gentle with her, he was uncompromising and hard with others. He mystified her, and she dreaded and secretly longed to hear his history.

The first night after dinner, when they went to the parlor, he had asked her if she played chess. She surprised herself by replying that she did, and he opened the board and they played several games, in which she was the victor; and from then on they played each evening. As she moved her men on the squares of the board between them, she would ask herself what were the names of the distant places which had been familiar to him? What kind of people had been his friends? What had been his pleasures? What were his anxieties and his history during the long, silent years? If she had not been so absorbed in her elder son when the two were children, she might have been more sympathetic with this one, but believing what she did about him, nothing could have surprised her. Had he told her of new dishonors and new disgraces, she would have taken them for granted.

As she confronted him across the chess-board, she put to herself questions which he would have answered

in a moment, had she spoken them aloud, but that she would never do. What part had women played in the life of her son?—a question that every woman thinks, first of all. He was married, perhaps; possibly he had children, sons like himself—sons whose father had been a thief. How could she know? He told her nothing.

John, facing her, was too subtle not to follow her thoughts. Her hand paused over her pawns, giving apparently a more fixed attention to this game than she had ever given to his game of life or to his chances. He understood that she judged him and condemned him, and he knew that if he had told her that a prison had sheltered him in the interval, she would not have been surprised: men had gone to prison for lesser crimes than his. And he in his turn wondered what would arouse her pity, what would arouse her mercy. That she had tenderness he knew; he had seen her tender to others; he had seen her lean on his brother's arm; he had seen his brother kiss her, as he would have been glad to do. He had seen on her face the light that a son likes to remember.

On one occasion when her hand touched his over the game she asked herself: "Is it possible that this is the hand of a thief?" and raised her eyes, when he was not looking, to discover in his face signs of weakness, moral turpitude or failure. In that keen, indifferent countenance, in those eyes, cynical as they were, on that grave mouth, she saw only signs of those qualities any woman might love. She was so intent in her study

of him that she forgot to move her men, and John, glancing up, reminded her and flushed, as he met her scrutinizing eyes.

When Tremaine had once conceived a plan, he was not at rest until he had put it into execution. Immediately on arriving he set all the negroes he could hire to work in the fields and stoning the pastures, and by the end of the first week he had forty negroes at work on the property, while old Hanny had neighbors in the stalls for the first time.

He worked his changes rapidly and with a master hand. It had always been a tradition that nothing was accomplished quickly in the South. Things were accomplished very quickly on the Tremaine plantation. Money was no object to him, and he himself superintended everything. He tramped daily over the property, making himself familiar with every acre. From her window, Mrs. Tremaine watched him crossing the fields to the barn in the early morning, and throughout the day she could see his figure moving hither and thither over the meadows, and noted his unflagging energy. Mammy told her:

"De niggers have to step up, Mis' Molly; dey'se terrible 'fraid of Marse John. He cuts out at 'em like a sarpint." And she laughed with delight. "Reckin dey's gwine to be some craps nex' year. He-all sutinly will tear up de berry earth an' get gole out ob it."

The three weeks between John's arrival and her going North passed quickly. She saw her son master

of Riverside, and he was a charming host to his mother. In the short twenty-one days his personality had become felt everywhere. He had been but twice to the town, but every one was talking of him. Every morning he was up at five o'clock like a farmer, and he went to bed in the small hours, passing his mother's room softly; but she was a light sleeper and wondered how he could work as he did on the few hours' rest that he gave himself. He intended to repaint the house and re-roof it. Already the colors of the paints were there to choose from. He also spoke of completely refurnishing. Everything suggested to him improvement, renovation. She was bewildered, and, in spite of herself, became interested. Since she had refused to accept the place from him for her own, she had no right to suggest to him that she would like to leave it untouched, but some of the changes were an anguish to her, for she would rather have seen Riverside fall into ruin than become a modernized, comfortable house. She was full of sentiment and as deep in her nature as was John.

He asked her no questions, he consulted her about nothing, and yet he laid his plans before her, and she listened, set and reserved, non-committal, suffering, and cold.

Mrs. Tremaine was far too clever a woman not to understand that he had a purpose in what he did and that even his apparent indifference was in reality only frankness. She was too much of a woman not to know that though he was a strong man and the master, and that although nothing could stay his progress, she had only

to speak, to move her hand, to suggest, and everything would be hers.

In the short space of time they were together each day, she found that she grew to understand him better and that she no longer found him incomprehensible. She found, too, that she was learning about other countries, and although in his narratives John only appeared in some vague personality as "a chap I knew" she began to hear of his life. She learned of the East, saw places whose very names had always charmed her, and she listened entranced as she sat with her work.

He looked at his property through the eyes of a practical man of affairs. He saw a fortune in the land, and he was determined to realize it. One day Mrs. Tremaine at luncheon entertained two strange men who talked with John about coal. She listened, realizing that the run-down property was beginning to assume brilliant possibilities.

That evening, when they found themselves once more alone she waited with great curiosity to hear his news, but he told her nothing. He was not cruel, but was fighting a battle demanding tact as well as strength.

They did not, this evening, play chess, but he took a chair at the window, through which what breeze there was came to him, heavy with the smell of honeysuckle. It was full moon, and in the warm summer night the lamps had not been lit, and Mrs. Tremaine saw her son plainly in the white light. She could study him, and

it was impossible, she thought, that a man such as John should not please the most fastidious woman. On this night he wore white trousers and a dinner coat; his black tie and coat and his dark, sleek head were distinct spots in the moonlit room. He was brown as an Indian. Already his mysterious past was beginning to be indistinct in the mother's mind; John was emphatically connecting himself with Virginia. How glad she would be to wipe away from her remembrance the blot upon his name! She cried to herself mentally a thousand times, looking at him at moments in a way she would never let him see: "Oh, John, how could you do it; how could you do it?" And at those times even his charm spoke against him. She called him weak, blamed him bitterly, and hardened her heart.

This night she was longing to ask him the result of the afternoon's prospecting, but she could not bring herself to put direct questions.

John smoked for a little, then asked abruptly:

"When does Malvern come back?"

He had shown no interest in the neighborhood, had never asked for any one, and she was surprised.

"Isobel tells me that her father will be home next week."

John said to himself: "I dare say it will not be easy to avoid him."

As he spoke, his mother's loyalty was roused for the first time and she resented the fact that there was any one in the world that could give him pain to meet. Neither she herself, nor her husband, nor Judge Tremaine had

ever been afraid of any man, and now John dreaded to meet his neighbor. It was bitter. She said slowly :

“Redmond rarely ever comes over. Since he lost his fortune, he has shut himself from us.”

After a second, in which she watched acutely his expression, she was surprised to see that he was smiling.

“Malvern is the only man who ever gave me any advice.” He knocked the ashes from his cigar. “I remember very well the occasion—as well as though it happened yesterday,” he said, still smiling. “Big men don’t realize the impression they make on young chaps.” He laughed. “Now I am not a big man, of course, but in South Africa I have been rather a figure of a certain kind for the last few years. At all events, no end of people have sought me for one reason or another. Whenever a young fellow came in to ask my advice, I remembered that hot summer morning when I stood before the president of the little bank here.”

He saw the keen attention given to him by his listener; he felt the emotion with which his mother heard every word that told of his career.

“I was a hero worshipper, and Malvern was one of my heroes. He had been awfully decent to David and me, but I had never spoken with him in business hours. It is hard to believe that a great big six-footer of a country chap could shake in his boots before the president of a little bank in his own town, but my hands were cold when I handed him the paper he asked me for and waited for further orders.”

John smoked. Down in the orchard to the left, the

nightingales began to sing. Both mother and son listened, and he remembered how often in the heart of Africa he had seemed to hear again that divine music.

He continued : " Malvern, for some curious reason, had done me the honor to observe me, and strangely enough he alone had noticed that I was unhappy. I have often thought that he must be a man of unusually delicate feeling."

John waited a moment and his mother murmured : " He is a distinguished gentleman."

" Malvern did not ask me any questions, but what he said was to the point ; I have never forgotten it. He leaned forward over his desk and looked at me.

" ' You must not let obstacles take an important place in your mind, John,' he said. ' Remember they only serve to strengthen a man's determination, and that every time he overcomes one he is the stronger for it. The consciousness of overcoming an obstacle is one of the most invigorating things in a man's career.'

" It wasn't a very brilliant piece of advice, mother, you will say. Just a remark or two from an important man to a subordinate at the time when the young chap needed it."

John smoked. " I never saw him again, and the first thing I shall do when I see him now will be to thank him. I can at least do that ! "

It was a curious moment. The mother of the thief listened. After this interview, which he remembered with tenderness, the young man had gone to Richmond,

and coolly stolen ten thousand dollars. He could scarcely have told her an incident which would have brought to her eyes more distinctly his wretched past. Her heart rose in her throat, her cheeks flushed, she leaned forward with hands clasped ; it was on her lips to say the words that rang through her :

“ John, John ! How could you do it ? ”

CHAPTER VI

ONE morning John found his fields deserted, and only Bob in the stable, a curry brush in hand, remained to give news of his own people.

"De niggers done gone on strike, Marse John. Yessir! Dey do 'low you'se a bery hard marster."

John laughed. In his white flannels and panama, cool and indifferent, he was an object of awe and admiration to Bob, who thought him something of a god.

"What are their grievances, Bob?"

"Lawd, Marse John," drawled the negro, who had no idea what the word meant, "dey ain't got no grimmances. It's de hours an' de wages."

"I pay them more than any man in the district."

"Dat's just it, Marse John," said the negro keenly. "Yo' done ought to pay dem less. Den dey'd have stayed."

John glanced at the summer fields, where the light, palpitating and delicate, hung over the meadows like a golden curtain. Here and there were deep furrows on the old pastures. Along the lower meadows the tossed-up earth was rich and brown, indicating the fertile creative heart. It seemed to cry: "Sow me with seed! I will repay." Every hour lost seemed a shocking waste to this ambitious man. Moreover, his time was limited. This summer only would he till

and plough and sow. The following year he would return to South Africa.

"They're a pack of idlers," he said. "I'll show them I'm not dependent on a lot of lazy niggers. Do what you've got to do, my boy," he added sharply to Bob, "and Nolan will lend you a hand."

He made Nolan and Bob harness to a hand plough a pair of splendid horses that Nolan had bought in Richmond, and he himself drove the plough into the earth of one of the fallow fields.

During the fifteen years which had seen his battle with destiny, he had turned his hands to many things, but he had always loved anything that had to do with the earth. He was thinking of this as he ploughed through the dry earth of his own farm. Already in his mind he conceived a model property, and it pleased him to think that what had been a splendid old place in Colonial days should be again a splendid modern property, brought back to its old perfection by his hand. It had been said of him in South Africa that he never touched anything that he did not leave the better for his interest; he would prove this to be true here, at any rate.

Planning and musing, he ploughed into the rich Virginia soil. Suddenly he heard some one call out to him and stopped to look in the direction of the voice. On the other side of the gray old fence which separated the Tremaine property from the Malvern estate sat a girl on a bay mare, evidently waiting for the bars to be let down. The girl's hat swung from

an elastic on her arm. She beckoned to the ploughman with her whip in an authoritative manner :

"Let down the bars for me, will you?" And there came a rather tardy "please," as she held back her mare.

Tremaine, with his hands on the plough handle, glanced at her, but did not hasten to do what she asked.

The young girl nodded commandingly and cried out again in a clear voice :

"Will you let down these bars? My horse does not like to stand."

Tremaine wound his reins about the handle of the plough and came forward. He was hot, felt for his handkerchief, discovered that he had left it in his other clothes when he changed, and wiped his face and forehead with his sleeve.

He was sure that this was Isobel Malvern. In her summer habit she was slender as a boy. She was flushed by exercise, and her red curving lips were parted, showing brilliant white teeth. Reddish brown curls clustered about her forehead and her large eyes were deeply blue with purple depths, like certain seas that he had seen in his travels. He recalled the little creature he had known fifteen years before. There were no freckles on that lovely skin, and the wild curls of the child were neatly gathered into braids about her head. But the ploughman did not awaken any memory in the mind of the young girl; she looked at him with cool indifference and patted her mare's neck.

"I am used to riding through here. Let down the bars, please," and it was a not-to-be-disregarded command.

Tremaine obeyed, and the mare, with careful little feet, stepped over.

"My mare's feet will not hurt the field," said the girl, and added: "I suppose you are one of Mr. Tremaine's new men?"

John understood that she took him for a day laborer. The humor of it amused him. He unwound the reins from the handle of the plough and answered:

"Yes, I am the new man."

As she touched her mare, she called to him pleasantly:

"Thank you very much."

He glanced after her as she rode away. She sat her horse well, and he said to himself:

"In her eyes, clothes make the man."

The new man! Would he have taken her for a kitchen maid, if he had found her washing dishes? "It is not what one is, but what people think you are," he mused.

The girl's passing on the warm beautiful afternoon would have been an agreeable incident had he not been embittered by the thought that if she knew of his past she would never care to see him again. And the sight of Isobel brought back to his mind some of his affairs with women. There had been one girl in particular whom he would have liked to ask to be his wife; but the fact that he should have had to tell her who he was

and where he came from and what his reputation was at home, had kept him from declaring himself. As for the other women, they had known nothing about him, excepting that he was a good lover, a generous friend and thoroughly liked wherever he went.

He dug the plough deeper into the earth, and the dirt spurted up. How clear the girl's voice had sounded across the meadow! It was rather odd to be ordered about by a young girl. He was used to commanding and to mastery. The touch of authority from a woman was not unpleasant. "Let down the bars!" There had been an imperious note in her voice. . . .

Miss Malvern had ridden over to bid Mrs. Tremaine good-by and she had hoped to meet Mr. John Tremaine, of whom every one was talking. She had first heard of his coming through her own Mammy, who had told her, as Pompey had told Mr. Leavitt, of Mammy Chloe's joy. The mysterious son of her beloved friend had come back fabulously rich, "high-handed and turrible proud, like all the Tremaines," she had heard with interest. From Mrs. Tremaine herself she had received no announcement. She only knew that the time had come for Mrs. Tremaine's departure, an event which they had both talked about for a long time, and which now was near at hand.

Isobel had the habit of leaving her horse in the stables and walking in through the kitchen to the living-room and taking Mrs. Tremaine by surprise. To-day there was no Bob to hold her horse; instead, a tall,

well-set-up Irishman in shirt-sleeves sat on a soap box, cleaning a bridle. He sprang up as Isobel rode to the door and put his hand to his forelock. She threw herself from her horse easily. Here was another new man—a good-looking pair of them. She looked at this novel spectacle of a white servant working on the run-down property. Already the stable, the dear old dirty, disorderly stable, was as neat as a pin.

“Why, where’s Bob?” she asked.

“Hatchin’ eggs,” said the Irishman coolly as he took the horse.

“Hatching eggs!” she repeated.

“Shure, it’s the wan thing he’s fit for—settin’,” said the Irishman. “I just run out to clane a bit of bridle for the master unbeknownst,” he explained. “Not that it’s my work, at all, at all. Wull I lift the saddle off her?”

“No,” said Miss Malvern. “Let her stand as she is, and when I call from the kitchen, fetch her round to the front door.”

She could not ask this man of his master, but in the kitchen Mammy received her with joy.

“Glory hallelujah, Miss Isobel! Ma boy’s come home!”

“Dear old Mammy, you must be awfully glad.”

“Glad! Why, he’s jest ackshually gwine to be President of the United States. Honey,” she said solemnly, “you’s gwine to see a gra-ate big man.”

Isobel patted her cheek. “Is Mrs. Tremaine at home? I’ll go in.”

Mammy was making biscuits; she continued her work of cutting out the dough in little rounds.

"She's home. You gwan in."

But Isobel lingered, for she knew the negress so well that she understood there was something wrong. Mammy lifted her eyes suddenly to Isobel.

"What fo' de Lawd gin her two sons, Missy, if she was only gwine to love one?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"She don' keer a mite for Marse John, an' he is so kine and good."

"You must be wrong, Mammy." The girl went toward the door. She felt there was disloyalty in hearing anything about the family outside of Mrs. Tremaine's presence.

"Sho'," said the colored woman coolly, going on with her work. "Didn' I raise 'em both, two lil' boys? Marse John was straight as a pine tree."

CHAPTER VII

ISOBEL went thoughtfully toward the living-room, where she was accustomed to find her friend. The quiet security of Riverside had been invaded and already she felt the change in the atmosphere. There was an unknown person now in the environment and a stranger was the master. In passing through the hall, she had noticed on a chair a man's suit of clothes, neatly brushed and folded, and by their side russet boots on their forms. She smelled for the first time in this house the odor of tobacco, and through the open door glanced into the little front room used as a repository for riff-raff—which in a Southern home is considerable—and there she saw a table in the window, with writing things neatly arranged upon it; it had become the office of Riverside's new master.

Then she opened the door into the sitting-room and saw there a transformation indeed. She had loved the shabbiness of the old place, and was accustomed to the chairs without springs, where her idle hand had met the loosened horsehair in the frayed old arms. She was accustomed to the disorder, and every object in the room had memories for her which she would not lose. She had watched life unfold here; she had grown to know and love Mrs. Tremaine, and their friendship had formed and developed in the

agreeable intimacy of the old room. Mrs. Tremaine, reserved and often unhappy, had opened her heart with extraordinary frankness to this younger woman, and Isobel, keen and thoughtful beyond her years, had understood Mrs. Tremaine's loneliness and craving for affection; had listened to her hero worship of David; and had gone discreetly into the past with the woman who had lost her husband and her son. Of John Tremaine she had heard nothing, and in spite of her intimacy she knew that there were subjects which her friend would not touch upon with her.

As Isobel now stood on the threshold of the living-room, she saw that the room had been changed as though by magic. This old parlor, which had welcomed back Tremaine, was the first thing that had been altered by the new master. For him too it was filled with memories, but they were not pleasant ones, like Isobel's. Here he had made love to Julia Cameron; here he could recall hot scenes with his brother, and days of bitter loneliness. He had wanted to forget it all.

The shabby curtains had been replaced by cretonne of bright, soft hues, with great peacocks in the pattern, surrounded by large-petalled flowers. In the center of the room stood a fine old table covered with brocade and books; flowers filled bowls and vases of foreign design, evidently collected by a person of taste. There were only mats upon the floor, but they too had been woven in far lands. In one corner was stacked a quantity of savage-looking weapons. Over the chimney-

piece, however, still hung the stag's head—she had been told that John Tremaine had shot it as a boy ; once Mammy had told her this with pride. The room had much distinction, but it failed to please Isobel. Its faded loveliness was gone, and Tremaine, in these renovations, had dealt Isobel his first blow.

The windows were open, and she could see the luxuriant honeysuckle vines covering the verandah. Through breaks were visible vistas of the oaks and of the unmown lawns. The penetrating perfume of the honeysuckle came sweetly to her ; it always made her think of Riverside. In the window, on a work-table, lay the pile of white linen with which she had seen Mrs. Tremaine's hands busied.

As she stood there, three or four negroes came from the back of the house with scythes over their shoulders. Indolently, every gesture marked by the slowness of their race, they began to cut the high, flowering grass. They never worked long without singing, and presently in unison, in the soft voices she loved, they began to sing :

“ Hard times, hard times,
Come again no mo' . . .”

“ Hard times,” she said to herself, “ I suppose they have gone from Riverside. They say he is so terribly rich !”

“ Done brung home bar'ls an' bar'ls of gole,” her Mammy had told her, with widening eyes ; but she

could not feel, indifferent as she was by nature and education to material things, that barrels of gold would mean very much to her distinguished friend, or that anything could soften the rudeness of a change which apparently had not resulted in making Mrs. Tremaine feel at home—had not created such an atmosphere as should decide her to remain. All her life she had heard stories of John Tremaine; just what those stories were she could not have quite specified, but the impression that they made upon her mind had varied. Every time his name had been mentioned it was surrounded by mystery. And with romance, too! “John Tremaine!” There was a shadow upon it. She could not definitely say just what she imagined this second son to be or to have done—there was no direct scandal, but there were imputations. He had run away from home—that every one knew. He had nearly broken his mother’s heart. It made her bitter toward him to think of it, and when she thought of him at all, she blamed him. Her father had never spoken of John Tremaine, and as discretion was one of her strong points, she had asked nothing about him. He was a blot on the fine old ’scutcheon, and out of place in Mrs. Tremaine’s serene life. Yesterday, in speaking of him, her Mammy had said:

“Chloe do akshually worship dat boy, Missy Isobel.” And this was the one soft note that fell in with the harsher sounds. Now, as she had just passed through the kitchen and heard Mammy Chloe’s words about the child she nursed, she saw that somewhere, in some

heart, there was a tenderness for the black sheep. Far back in her own memory there had been for years a faint recollection, and to-day it had taken a distinct form. She remembered now quite plainly that she had once seen John Tremaine.

When she was a little thing, still holding on to her Mammy's skirts, she had secured sufficient freedom from her black guardian to pick blackberries all by herself from the vines on the gray old gate down in the Back Pasture. With the poignant memories of all childish escapades, she remembered how those berries had tasted, picked very fast and eaten as hastily ; she remembered the feel of the summer day and the exciting thrill of being naughty and alone. She remembered, too, how a big man had come along, walking as though he did not see her, with his hands in his pockets, and his head bowed down, and how, still unconscious of the little child, he had come up to the fence and leaned on it in an attitude that even the tiny girl had known to be one of unhappiness. She remembered that she had tried to climb upon the rails of the fence, unseen by him, close to his side. Isobel had always been a comforting child. The only child of her father, replacing her mother to the lonely man, she had learned when a baby that women must be comforters—that it is part of their work in the world. Down in the Back Pasture, hurriedly, she had gone up to the side of somebody whom she took to be crying and in need of comfort. When John Tremaine, who, though not crying, undoubtedly was unhappy, finally turned and saw

the berry-stained child with her large eyes fixed on him, Isobel was too frightened to speak and had burst into excited tears. She remembered how he had picked her up, wiped her mouth with his handkerchief, kissed her, and delivered her over to her frantic Mammy. That is all that she recalled of the occasion, but she did remember that when she was put to bed on the following night her Mammy told her solemnly: "Marse John Tremaine has run away."

Run away! The words went into her confused, childish memories with his loneliness and his despair, and from henceforth whenever she thought of him, he seemed to be running away like a shadow across her life, and for many, many years, that dark figure had held a certain place in her mind and she had thought of him as some one who needed comfort.

Gradually, of course, it all faded, and only the general outline remained. Even the little charm there was in this picture from the past was gone now, for what she had heard of the man and his unwelcome return into his mother's life put her at enmity with him. His record was a dark thing; he had broken his mother's heart. When Mrs. Tremaine entered, as she did in a few moments, the girl turned to her with flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

"Oh," she said, and her voice, which was one of her great charms, thrilling and peculiarly sweet, trembled. "It can't be true that you are going away from Virginia? Tell me it is not true! How can I ever let you go?"

Mrs. Tremaine kissed her gently, smiled with her gracious smile, and without comment on the altered room or any personal remark, made Isobel take her usual place in the window, and she herself took up her sewing. Tranquilly, without referring to her expected departure or to the changes that had taken place in her surroundings, Mrs. Tremaine occupied herself with her work, leading back to the six months earlier when she had last seen Isobel, before the girl's journey abroad.

Isobel clasped her hands, and, controlling her feelings, she delicately spared the older woman. She thought she saw on her friend's face the marks of recent tears and was too much of a woman not to know that Mrs. Tremaine had kept her waiting so long because she had been trying to calm herself before coming downstairs.

"Tell me about your travels, Isobel."

"Didn't I in my letters?"

"Letters!" exclaimed Mrs. Tremaine. "Oh, I want to hear your voice. I went to Paris when I was first married, you know, and I can see the flower markets now—big bouquets of heliotrope with white paper round them. All Paris suggests flowers to me."

Isobel thought of the traveler who had returned from so much more exciting voyages, and wondered what his narratives would be, and what his mother knew of them. She answered Mrs. Tremaine's questions and asked her nothing, her own thoughts clinging around one idea: these delightful meetings were now to end, and she would not be able to come to Riverside any

more. As they talked, the sun set, and Bob fetched up her horse to the door. The sounds of the scythes were distant at the bottom of the mown field. The girl leaned over impulsively and took Mrs. Tremaine's hand.

"Must you really go? Isn't there some miracle that could keep you?"

Mrs. Tremaine kept her eyes upon her work.

"Do you believe in miracles?" she asked.

"Yes," said Isobel ardently.

She meant what she said, and her friend knew it. Her faith, her attitude of expectancy toward life, a certain mental courage which had in it something masculine, were charming and very attractive to the less assured woman, in whom years of disappointment, of ever-recurring sadness, had created a certain hopelessness. Mrs. Tremaine folded her work, looked up, and smiled. She saw before her the beautiful face of the girl. Isobel's nature was so deep and rich that notwithstanding the difference between their ages, Mrs. Tremaine was able to meet her on common grounds and to find her a satisfying companion.

She looked at her lovingly. It would cost her as much to leave Isobel—nearly as much—as to leave Virginia. Isobel and Leavitt, the rough home-lands, the beloved house, all went together to make the environment that was her very life; yet her quiet face gave no evidence of the depth of her feelings. She was thinking to herself: "How I wish that David had married a woman like Isobel! How I wish that she were my daughter!"

"You are quite right," she said. "Keep your faith, honey. I find it so beautiful in others and yet have never been able to grasp it for my own."

"It is so easy to believe," said Isobel.

Mrs. Tremaine smiled. "Perhaps," she said, "you may never have reason to change your point of view. Lives and natures are essentially different, my dear." She looked at her earnestly. "You found no one abroad?"

Isobel shook her head and laughed.

"I would not leave Virginia," she said, "for any one, you know, and if you were not going away, you know that I would not leave you."

"You will come to visit me," said Mrs. Tremaine.

Isobel looked around the room, already so changed.

"It will not be the same," she said slowly.

Mrs. Tremaine gently shook her head. "For you," she said, "remember, my darling, for many, many years all changes will be beautiful."

It was impossible for Isobel to put any of the questions that rose to her mind. She longed to hear the mother speak of the returned son. Every time a step sounded without, in the hall, she thought to herself: "Now he will come—I shall see him." But no one disturbed their tranquil hour.

As she rose to go she said:

"I shall be here every day until you leave. You will let me come, will you not?" And then exclaimed, smiling, thinking of her meeting with the workman in the field: "You have an extraordinary man-of-all-work, haven't you?"

Mrs. Tremaine repeated, surprised: "Man-of-all-work? Do you mean Nolan? He is a character."

Mrs. Tremaine took her out on the porch herself and watched the girl mount and ride away in the sunlight.

All the way back to Malvern, the impression of the man she had not seen was strong with Isobel. He had become to her already the occupant, the creator of that changed room. Already John Tremaine had put a seal upon Riverside. She knew that in order to create such an impression, he must have a strong personality.

There was no longer before her eyes the exquisite picture of the solitary Mrs. Tremaine in the faded room. There was a master there. She recalled her friend's words of a few moments before: "For you all changes will be beautiful." Well, this was the first, and Mrs. Tremaine was wrong; there could be nothing beautiful in the loss of her friend and in the transformation of the property which, with its rack and ruin, its distinction and its charm, had laid its beauty close to the borders of her own home. The Malverns were nearly as poor as the Tremaines had been. Their misfortunes had been a link between the women—Isobel could give Mrs. Tremaine nothing but love. Old Mr. Malvern, unsuccessful for many years, could do nothing to help his neighbor, and Mrs. Tremaine would have been too proud to have accepted the slightest assistance from him.

As Isobel rode, she saw in the distance the tall form of the laborer going leisurely home. Her father was away and would not return for several weeks. She

wrote him that night: "Daddy, great changes are taking place at Riverside. Mrs. Tremaine is going North to Judge Tremaine's widow and her grandchildren. That mysterious man, John Tremaine, has come home. He is doing wonderful and dreadful things to Riverside. Everything is changed."

John had wounded afresh his mother's pride. He knew it that night, as he sat before her over the chess-board. He felt all attitudes and all atmospheres keenly; and at present, although he was occupied in conquering the land, his more subtle campaign was the winning of his mother. On this especial night he knew that he had lost much ground. The sun of the long, hot day had blazed upon his face, and he was browner than ever. The plough had roughened his hands, and to her he seemed positively to exhale the odor of the fields in which he now lived from sunrise to sunset. She thought that, like Esau, he was selling the birthright of a gentleman of leisure for mere pottage. She could not understand why a rich man and a gentleman should work like a laborer in the fields. It was easy for her to be angry with him, and she made no effort to mitigate her feelings.

"Check, mother," he said, and regarded the board with satisfaction. She played an excellent game, and he did not often get the advantage. Then he looked up at her and found that she was steadily regarding him.

"No Tremaine," she said slowly, "has ever before worked in the fields like a common nigger."

He sat back a little from the board, placed his hands

in his pockets, his composure unruffled. He said tranquilly :

"If the niggers only loved to work as I do, mother, there would not be as much poverty in Virginia. Don't distress yourself ; it's only a sort of passion for the land that makes me go out and get near to it. I am proud of my furrows ; they are as straight as they can be. There is a bit of Adam in us all, you know, and a man wants to get down to the very soil itself to feel how much it belongs to him."

Mrs. Tremaine put her king out of check without replying.

"You are going North to-morrow ?" he asked, as she did not answer. And she said with evident reluctance :

"No. Julia writes that it is not convenient for her to receive me just at present. I am obliged to put off my going."

They played for a few moments in silence, and then John said :

"This is your home, you know." And he knew as he said so that she did not feel it home.

He thoroughly enjoyed the early mornings as he went out to his labor, and for a fortnight every day he ploughed the fields. Then the body of Italian laborers he had engaged in the North were brought in by a freight train ; he had found in Richmond a competent man to oversee them, and he laid out with his overseer his scheme for model fruit and vegetable gardens to be carried out by his Italian workmen.

Mrs. Tremaine had no intention that John and Iso-

bel should meet. For she had an intuition that there would be danger there. In spite of her hard antagonism, she found it impossible not to be influenced by her son's charm and his attraction. He was so delightful to look at—over and over again she rested her eyes upon him with pleasure. She could speak of him to no one, she avoided the subject even with Leavitt.

Though her fine sense of honor would not permit her to criticize him to a stranger, she was not yet prepared to acknowledge any loyalty to him. But there was Mammy Chloe, who on every occasion planted herself before her mistress and eulogized her boy. Mrs. Tremaine, curiously enough, found that these monologues, ecstatic, highly colored by the negress's imagination and loving heart, were not distasteful to her.

CHAPTER VIII

THE mornings, as he walked about his farm, were lovely. When he took his midday rest at noontime, he ate under the trees the luncheon Mammy had put up for him. He touched the grass with affectionate fingers; it belonged to him. He stretched himself out on the soil with delight. It was his own as far as the horizon beyond the fields. As he rested during a noon hour on the edge of a field, he heard a girl's voice say:

"Will you be good enough to put down the bars?"

Here she was again, close to the bars, looking at him with condescending friendliness. He answered:

"I can't let the bars down; they are nailed."

She exclaimed with disappointment:

"What a shame! The pretty old fence has been spoiled. I shall have to ride all the way round, and it is so hot."

It was not a high fence. A Southern girl on such a mare as she rode should have been over it in a second. He wondered why she hesitated.

"Mr. Tremaine is going to do wonders with this old place, isn't he?"

"He is going to try," said the unknown. Miss Malvern regarded him with curiosity.

"I suppose you are hired by the month?"

"No, year in and year out." He had never seen eyes so blue and so frank. She pulled her horse back from the fence.

"They say Mr. Tremaine has a terrible temper and treats people like brutes."

The farmer's tan was deep. She did not see him color under it.

"When I have stayed here year in and year out, I will tell you more of him."

"The place needs a good man on it."

He leaned his foot on his plough.

"If Mr. Tremaine is such a brute as you say, I am not likely to be a good man for the place. 'Like master, like man,' you know."

"You seem industrious."

He lifted his straw hat and bared his dark, handsome head. There was a line of white around the tan showing how fair his skin was in reality. In his dark blue flannel shirt and blue overalls, he was a splendid, vigorous figure. But to Isobel the fact that he was a white man and not a negro accounted to her for his correct speech, from which, however, he had eliminated every grace of tone.

"Why don't you jump over?" the workman asked.
"Can't your mare take the fence?"

The pretty animal not only could, but wanted to, and pawed the meadow.

"I never jump her," the rider answered; "I have promised my father not to take fences."

"Is it possible that this girl is afraid?" he thought, and his voice was not gracious as he suggested:

"If you will dismount, I will take your mare over, and then you can climb the fence yourself."

He vaulted the fence and stood beside her. She looked at him in amazement. His assurance and air of authority were not in keeping with his character as a day laborer. He put his hand on the mare's bridle, touching her mane carelessly.

The girl gathered up her reins and changed color. The manner and personality of this farm laborer troubled her. Before Tremaine could help her, she slipped from her saddle to the ground and said haughtily:

"Netty is a prize mare; don't injure her."

Tremaine mounted, rode back a few paces and, turning, flew the fence; then threw himself off Netty's back. Miss Malvern got over the fence quickly, and as he offered to help her, she thanked him with condescension.

"I shall not spoil your field," she said, and before he knew it, she had ridden away.

John finished his labor early that day, and as he passed through the kitchen with his dinner pail, he heard his mother in the sitting-room talking with Miss Malvern. His mother's laugh, sweet and musical, was a new song to him, and the laugh of the girl too was delightful.

"Miss Isobel," said Mammy, "is sho' a honey chile, Marse John. She done light up de house more'n a million candles."

When later he came downstairs, he found his mother alone. He would not ask her whether she knew of his meeting with Isobel, but he soon saw that she was ignorant of it, and with the first curiosity that the girl had aroused in him, he actually wondered why she had not told of the second encounter ?

One afternoon, John returned from Richmond, hot and dusty, looking forward to the cool porch and a refreshing drink of Mammy's making. As he came walking up from the station, he saw before the horse-block a saddle-horse held by Bob, who rhythmically passed his brown hand up and down the animal's shining neck.

"Mistah Malvern, Marse John," said the negro, pointing with his finger toward the house, and Tremaine realized as he went up the steps that the interview he had courted and dreaded, with the man whom he had not seen for fifteen years, was now to take place.

Under the vines at the end of the gallery, his mother sat talking with her neighbor. Mr. Malvern rose as Tremaine came forward. Mrs. Tremaine noticed that her son thrust both hands in his pockets as he came forward and did not offer his hand to the guest. He bowed, nevertheless, gracefully, and his mother said quickly :

"John, I think you know Mr. Malvern."

She was surprised that no embarrassment came across her son's face. On the contrary, she saw him smile and bend upon Mr. Malvern a look that was almost benignant.

John Tremaine spoke with ease :

"I have never forgotten Mr. Malvern. Please keep your chair, sir." And Mrs. Tremaine realized that their neighbor himself had not spoken.

John leaned upon the gallery-rail—tall, dark, vigorous, perfectly at ease. Success was written all over him. He bore the unmistakable mark of a man of authority, of a man of power.

Before him was a fine example of a type that still exists in the South of the United States. Mr. Malvern was spare, nervous of build, and carried his sixty years well. On a pair of shoulders that would have done honor to a younger man was set a fine gray head, beautifully moulded and carried with the dignity and assurance that are present in a man's carriage only when that which lies behind him is secure. His features were fine and aquiline, but his expression had none of the sweetness that marked Leavitt's weaker and more gentle countenance.

Malvern had hoped to avoid meeting John Tremaine. He had understood that John was absent in Richmond to-day and had risked riding over to see Mrs. Tremaine. He said ceremoniously :

"I think I should not have known you. Fifteen years work transformations. I dare say you find us all changed."

It was easier than he thought to meet the glance of this man. There was nothing shifty about it ; it was direct and compelling.

"I assure you I have found things much as I left

them," said John. "Of course, there are some changes. I found them all agreeable, however."

Malvern inclined his head slightly.

"You are making great transformations yourself in Riverside."

"Yes," said Tremaine, "and even my mother, who is conservative, is growing to approve of them."

He glanced toward her. She was listening intently and the importance of the moment weighed upon her so heavily that she breathed with difficulty. She was suffering for her son, with the blot on his name, now standing under the fire of the glance of the big man of the district—standing before the only one who beside the lawyer and herself knew of his crime.

A love for John stirred in her every hour more deeply—a sacred love which should have been his years ago. She was now fighting for him, longing to protect him from the condemnation and the antipathy which she knew were in Malvern's mind. John's sudden turning to her now touched her, and she made herself smile, looking at him frankly as she answered something that a month ago she never would have confessed:

"Of course I approve. John is doing wonders."

The moment was not lost on Malvern. He had regarded John as an iconoclast, a man rich by God knows what processes or means, a cheap prospector in an old country, and his methods on all hands he sternly disapproved. The introduction of foreign labor alone was obnoxious to him. He had positively turned his eyes away from the transformed property touching the

ruin of his own. Slow himself, with the aversion to changes that marks age as well as the South, indolent, a man to be carried along by the tide of events and without the vigor to stem it, John Tremaine's character could never be sympathetic to him. But the man before him was not the man he had thought to see ; there was no doubt about that. He was undoubtedly a gentleman and a man of distinction. He saw, too, in this moment, that John had won his mother. He knew Mrs. Tremaine intimately ; he had followed her life, and he was enough of a psychologist to know that if in these few months this disgraced son had fascinated his mother, had broken down her prejudices, he must be a man of power. But Tremaine could not win him as he had won a woman and a sentimental lawyer.

Tremaine's look was fixed on the banker with great intentness. Whilst the other was studying him, John had gone back fifteen years. Unconscious of the antagonism he aroused, or if conscious of it, ignoring it, he said agreeably :

"I wanted to see you, Mr. Malvern. I am glad to find you here this afternoon."

Malvern said : " Yes ? " directly meeting the eyes of the man who had stolen from his bank the funds on which he had begun his career years ago. The eyes he met were clear and unwavering.

"I shall never forget that June morning fifteen years ago," said John. "You were then so good as to give me a few words of encouragement." He added : "I dare say you do not remember."

"Yes," said Malvern, "I remember perfectly."

"That's good," said Tremaine. "It is more satisfactory to share a memory than to recall it alone. I shall never forget your advice—your few words went with me and returned to me many times when I had need of them. I have always wanted to thank you."

Malvern was astounded, and John saw it. The Virginian took the stranger's sang-froid for callousness.

"I am afraid you overrate the importance of the interview, Tremaine."

And John answered: "We always overrate the importance of the things we cherish."

Before Malvern could reply, Tremaine's manner altered to the one his mother knew so well, the one she understood to be part of his complex character. His smile faded, his brow darkened, he threw back from his forehead the lock of dark hair that had fallen over it, and seating himself on the rail of the porch, clasped his hands round his knee and leaned forward to the banker. He spoke quickly, and as he spoke, Malvern and Mrs. Tremaine, though both were unconscious of it, saw the Big Tremaine, as he was known in South Africa, the man who without a farthing had made millions and had made others rich as well.

"As I have said, I am particularly pleased to see you here to-day, Mr. Malvern. If you had not come here, I should have taken the liberty of driving over to see you. I want to tell you of something of importance to you and to the district—I have brought you news. . . . When I was a boy, I used to believe that

Blythe Mountain and the high country to the west contained coal, and so it has proved. With the help of several experts, I have located and proved the vein—it is thick and the coal is of the best quality.

“Last week the Blythe Mountain Coal Company was formed, with a capital of two million of dollars, of which I have subscribed one-half at par. The other half has been taken by men in Richmond and New York. About half the capital has been used to pay for twenty thousand acres of coal lands,—I have conveyed to the company my Blythe Mountain land without charge—and the rest of the capital has been reserved to develop and exploit the mines.

“The railroad company has agreed to construct a branch connecting with the mines. I shall not be a director or an officer in the company, but I have agreed to act as business manager until the mines have been developed and put in operation.”

Mrs. Tremaine’s eyes were fixed upon him intently. She clasped her hands tightly. Tremaine, his eyes on the unmoved face of the old man, continued :

“I have suggested your name as president of the Blythe Mountain Coal Company, Mr. Malvern. The office carries with it a salary of ten thousand dollars, with an option on two thousand shares of stock at par.”

There was a moment’s silence. Tremaine unclasped his hands, took a cigar from his pocket, turned aside and lit it, and the second was eloquent. In it Mrs. Tremaine almost heard her heart beat. Malvern’s

hands grasped the arm of his chair. He moistened his lips. The plan laid before him was one of the most superb pieces of arrogance he had ever encountered. No advantage to himself struck him in the view of the situation presented by this scapegrace. He believed John wanted to purchase by a bribe his silence regarding the past. A flush crept up his cheek, and he rose from his chair in indignation and anger. He suddenly remembered Mrs. Tremaine, the mother.

"We Southerners, Tremaine, are dazed by sudden spectacles of success like yours. It is rather bewildering." He turned to Mrs. Tremaine with a smile.

John moved away from his mother and Malvern.

"Mother, I am going indoors to brush off the Richmond dust. I shall see you again, sir, and I shall be glad to discuss the matter further."

He inclined his head to his guest and went indoors.

Malvern stood as Tremaine left him, and Mrs. Tremaine at his side put up her hand and touched his arm. Her face was pale with emotion.

"You see, Redmond, he is trying to make amends."

Malvern turned to her. "John's debt to the bank was paid years ago. It is buried history."

Mrs. Tremaine put her handkerchief to her lips.

"Buried! It rises at night and walks! Buried!"

Malvern covered her hand with his.

"Control yourself, my dear friend."

After a second she asked:

"Redmond, will you refuse?"

"My dear lady!"

His tone was a stab to her.

"You mean you do not trust John—that you can never trust him; that no matter what he may do, the one fault of his boyhood will rise like a ghost and stare him down."

"My dear friend."

She went on with animation. "That however stainless his career since—for fifteen years—you can never trust John again?"

Malvern came over and took her hand.

"I beg that you will drop this miserable conversation, Molly!"

Mrs. Tremaine covered her eyes with her hand and so sat for a moment as though she wished to conceal the expression of her face. Then she removed her hand and looking at him with a touching appeal for his sympathy said:

"You don't know John!"

"That is true; he is a stranger."

"You don't know him."

"Of late years—only by reputation."

"But that reputation, Redmond, is brilliant, honorable."

"I believe that, Molly, yes!"

"He has returned here to benefit and enrich his Staté. He has already made himself respected and admired in Redlands. You cannot deny this, Redmond?"

"I don't deny it, Molly."

"No, no, you cannot tell me that a life of noble deeds, of generosity, of control, cannot atone ; you cannot tell me, Redmond, that he has not been purified, strengthened, by years of struggle and upright living !" She was leaning forward in her chair, pleading for Malvern's judgment to be favorable to her son.

It was an ordeal for him. He broke in :

"Please, my dear friend !"

"Think, Redmond, of what he could be in Virginia, of the good he could do ! Why should the opportunity to do good be denied John now ? It isn't right, it is cruel, it isn't right ! Why should one sole mistake blot a man's whole life, when it is overlaid by a structure of noble effort ?"

"Molly !"

Mrs. Tremaine covered her lips with her fingers for a moment to conceal their trembling.

"No one could be near him and not admire him ; he wins every one, high and low !"

Malvern listened to her pleading, his head slightly inclined. The expression of his face showed that he was deeply touched.

"I didn't think," she said slowly, "I should ever have to plead for a Tremaine. We have held our heads high, Redmond, but I do now plead with you for John ! Do not turn your back upon him now, Redmond ; give him a chance ! Think of those outcast years away from home, of his loneliness, of what he has become ; be human, Redmond, take what he offers you, stand by him in his effort to enrich Virginia !"

Malvern put out his hand and forcibly took one of her slender, trembling ones.

"Quiet down, Molly," he said, with the authority of a close friend ; "calm yourself."

Mrs. Tremaine waited.

"You ask me to give John something beyond my power, something"—Malvern touched his breast—"that is not here. Even for your sake, I cannot give my respect and confidence to a man who robbed a bank of money entrusted to his care."

"Oh !" she exclaimed, withdrawing her hand from his. "You are terrible, terrible !"

"No," said Malvern, "unfortunately I am only just. You say that John has repented and built up his character by fifteen years of righteous living. Of course that would count in his favor, but it would not wipe out his dishonor or give him back the respect of honorable men."

Mrs. Tremaine controlled herself by a mighty effort.

"Then you think," she questioned slowly, "that it is impossible to atone ? This is an unchristian doctrine !"

"If John has lived the life you say he has, if he has become the man you say he is, he may have atoned for the sin and may be forgiven in the hereafter, but I believe that he must pay the penalty throughout this life ; he can never hope to receive the same confidence and respect as those whose honor is untarnished."

Mrs. Tremaine held her handkerchief to her lips. She rose and said with dignity :

"I beg your pardon, Redmond, for having spoken

to you as I have about my son. Good-night. Don't come again. Don't let Isobel come, either. John and I will stand alone together. Good-by."

Malvern lifted her hand to his lips. "I can't keep Isobel away ; she worships you."

"I can, and I will ; but you must promise me one thing, and that is all I shall ever ask you to do for us."

"What do you want me to promise ? You know beforehand that it is granted."

"You must never let Isobel know of John's disgrace."

"I promised you my silence," said the banker, "on the day you told me what he had done. Do you think, my dear friend, it is necessary to ask me to renew that promise ?"

"No," said Mrs. Tremaine, "I know your sense of honor ; but if Isobel learns of our disgrace it will break my heart."

The moment was a hard one for Malvern, and he was anxious to put a close to the situation. He wrung her hand warmly.

"If it is the least comfort to you, I give you my promise now. You know perfectly well no word of what John has done shall ever pass my lips. Try to forget it," and he added in spite of himself, "as he seems to have done."

CHAPTER IX

DISGUSTED with the inefficiency and the laziness of the negro laborers in his district, John Tremaine, after the strike, had dismissed the whole gang that had been working in the fields and determined to import Italian labor from the North and with the help of a good foreman to lay out model gardens. The Italians had duly arrived and under the direction of Tremaine himself, in a short time gardens were started to raise early fruit and vegetables for the New York market.

His mother began to show great interest in his projects and even tried to share his farming anxieties. Opening one day a package of books which had come by post, he was surprised to find that she had sent for several books on agriculture and gardening.

Tremaine continued to work in the fields and occasionally went to see Leavitt, who found he was enjoying the visits and grew to welcome John's brusque entrances upon his solitude. He answered questions about Redlands and its inhabitants and talked about the crops and the means of procuring labor. His curiosity about Tremaine was swallowed up in his enjoyment of imparting information. Tremaine never appeared to think he might be unwelcome and at the end of July he asked Leavitt abruptly for his bill. They were in the library of the lawyer's house on Sunday afternoon ; be-

tween them on the table lay a rough sketch of a model vegetable garden which John intended to lay out and plant the following spring.

"I do not know what you mean," said the older man, straightening himself up as he stood by the table. "To what bill do you refer?"

"Your bill for legal services since I came to Redlands." Tremaine had never troubled himself much about Southern characteristics. If he had done so, his mother's unbending pride, his father's indolent extravagance and his brother's indifference, would have furnished him material enough.

"I am not aware," said Leavitt, "that I have rendered you any services, sir."

From time to time, John Tremaine's manner had been overbearing and curt, as at the first, but Leavitt had borne it patiently for the mother's sake. When John talked of his interests and his plans, he was charming. But Leavitt did not understand him in the least.

"I do not take a professional man's time to no purpose," John now said. "You are a busy man."

"You owe me exactly ten dollars and fifty cents, sir! Do you wish a bill? I have never presented a bill to a Tremaine in the history of my relations with your family."

"To judge of the situation in which I found you," said the younger man coolly, "your relations with my family seem to have been much to their advantage! I told you that I should pay for your time."

"Sir!" cried the lawyer, shaking, "you are insult-

ing! Do you mean to tell me that you want to pay for your conversation with me in my own house?"

Tremaine nodded. "For your painstaking information, for the time spent with me, yes."

Samuel Leavitt's hands trembled at his watch-cord, and his eyes flashed.

"I am a Southern gentleman; I do not sell my hospitality or my conversation."

Tremaine gathered up the papers, his plans for the garden.

"You have never offered me any hospitality," he returned unruffled. "You have never asked me to come to your house as a friend; you have never invited me to break bread. In Redlands I have not one living being to speak to, and I am willing to pay for the permission to talk with a gentleman. Since I came to live on the property, even your visits to my mother have become rare."

Leavitt replied, musing: "She has indeed refused to see me, for the first time in fifteen years."

Tremaine's face darkened. He took his hat and left Leavitt with a short "Good evening." He went into the hotel, where he had an engagement with a man who had come from Richmond to see him. The man was to send him a gang of Italians to work under contract. He said:

"How about a boss?"

"I will look after the men myself," replied Tremaine. "I speak Italian a little, and I prefer the responsibility."

The men were to be shipped to Redlands the follow-

ing week, and Tremaine intended to construct along the river bank shanties to house his foreign labor. The agent from Richmond looked hard at the gentleman in his blue serge suit and red tie.

"Italian yourself?" questioned the man, influenced by the tanned skin.

"No, Virginian; but once upon a time I was boss of a construction gang of three hundred Italians, and we did some good building."

"Gee Whittaker," grinned the agent, "then I reckon that you can oversee a handful of Dagos."

Tremaine remarked that he reckoned he could.

One afternoon, about six weeks later, as the lawyer waited for Mrs. Tremaine in her darkened parlor, he said to Mammy:

"Please tell your mistress I have come to see her on a matter of great importance." As he waited patiently before the chimneypiece for his hostess, he could see through the long windows the summer sunlight pouring its heat over lawns and fields, and it was with satisfaction that he thought:

"Well, the property has not gone to waste after all, thanks to this curious prodigal."

As he stood in the old parlor, sweet with the scent of flowers, the heavy summer air coming in through the windows, his eyes rested contentedly on the surroundings, and there came over him a sense of gratitude to John Tremaine.

"No matter what he has done in the past, he is a useful man in this present."

Just then, as he was in the glow of giving John his due, Mrs. Tremaine came softly in and found Leavitt swinging his eye-glasses, dreaming before the empty hearth.

She thought, as she came in, of how she had met him first thirty years ago, when they had introduced Samuel Leavitt to her as a rising young lawyer. She greeted him now with more than usual friendliness, and they sat together on the sofa near the window, where, through the aperture in the shutters, they could see the river and the white of the honeysuckle blossoms growing around the pillars of the porch.

"You have made me quite a stranger, Molly. It is a month since I have been so fortunate as to find you at home."

She said that she had been prostrated by the heat and her old headaches had returned, and through his shining glasses he looked at her intently, admiring her pale loveliness.

"You certainly do need a change. I hope the North will do you good. Do you go soon?"

"To-morrow."

He leaned forward eagerly.

"Dear, dear! were you really going North without letting me tell you good-by, my old friend?"

No, she had intended sending Bob over to ask him to come to supper, and Leavitt exclaimed:

"That's good! I'm glad of that. It would have been cruel to go away without giving me a sign."

She sat musing a moment, then rose and suggested that he should see the settlement from the windows

upstairs; she led him through the cool dark house to her son's room, where they could see the fields, the sweep of the river, the cluster of rough shanties which Tremaine had thrown up for his men. A group of Italians in blue shirts and striped trousers, hatless in the broiling sun, were engaged in laying out model vegetable gardens.

The two old friends stood side by side in the window of John's room. Mrs. Tremaine had married at seventeen and she was only eighteen years older than her eldest son, still a lovely woman, her figure youthful, her complexion fresh.

"Look, Sam; John is down there himself, with his men, planning an orchard."

And Leavitt saw the landholder in the dress of a common workman, gesticulating and talking with his Italian laborers. When they returned to the sitting-room and resumed their places on the sofa, Mammy fetched in a pitcher of sherbet, cool and grateful—moisture on the fine old glass of the pitcher, and green mint dark among the ice.

"'Scuse me, Mis' Molly,"—she poured the sherbet into the glasses—"Couldn't come befo' noways. Me and Bob has been totin' pails of lemonade down to dem shanty people."

Leavitt smiled curiously.

"You don't mean to tell me that Chloe harmonizes with the Italians?"

"She worships John, and so does that rascal Bob."

Leavitt drank in silence. Her soft hair, slightly touched with gray, rippled over her brow and ears;

her eyes, full of fire and charm, met Leavitt's steadily. She showed breeding and grace and had not permitted the marks of tears or grieving to disfigure her. The lawyer thought :

"She looks like a beautiful cameo and should be set in priceless pearls."

Back of them was a lifetime of unexpressed devotion, and his feeling culminated in the thought that she was going away from Virginia forever. With a gesture full of pathos and grace, he murmured :

"Molly, I am only sixty years old. My family is distinguished in Virginia, as is your own." He saw, or rather felt, her start. "I have a little fortune, a little property, and a still useful practice."

As he leaned forward and touched her hand, which she was too surprised to withdraw, he said :

"I beg that you will accept my life and my devotion."

Mrs. Tremaine caught her breath, and seeing the color die in her cheek, Leavitt continued more warmly :

"Don't go North, to Julia ; remain in Virginia as my wife." A slight smile touched her lips as she regained her composure.

"Sam, you're making a declaration to me !"

He returned solemnly : "I have loved you all my life."

In a second she was a girl again ; she gently laughed and patted the hand that held her own.

"Sam, Sam, you're making light of me, my dear old friend. The sherbet and the summer day . . ."

Leavitt interrupted with real passion : "No, Molly !"

and she saw that he was preparing to fall on his knees and rose hastily.

"Come," she said, slightly trembling; "let us never speak of this again." Leavitt, remaining where he sat, his hands clasped, looked up at her with adoration, his fine face transfigured by the hope of love and the light of youth which, like wings, had brushed across his countenance. Then he sighed deeply, arose, and came toward her with dignity.

"Always remember there is some one in the world who will serve you, and to whom you are—first of all. That knowledge is precious to a woman."

She stood looking at him with changed expression, then she put both hands out and he kissed them fervently. When he had gone, she walked up and down the sitting-room, pressing her handkerchief to her lips, and her step was as light as a girl's.

CHAPTER X

AFTER supper, Mrs. Tremaine said to John :

"I hear through Mr. Leavitt and Mammy that your Italians are unpopular." He replied that work was always unpopular among the lazy, and that the Italians were excellent laborers.

"I do not believe that you can introduce foreign habits in the South, John. We have our ways ; they go back as many years as the country's history. We are less foreign here than anywhere in the United States."

"Then what do you think will be the outcome of my little immigration scheme, mother ?"

"Why, I think the darkies will rebel."

Tremaine smiled. He did not believe it, but it amused him to contemplate it.

"It will go badly for them if they do," he said with determination.

His intercourse with the land, the companionship of the fields, his daily labor, had softened his stern expression. He had been homeless so long that his new life at home was grateful to him, body and soul.

"Whatever he has done," his mother reflected, "is past. The mark has been made, and like every spiritual and mental mark is deep ; but, though I do not know how, he seems to have effaced the scar ; I see no evi-

dence in him of weakness. Perhaps his triumph and conquest are greater than many a man with less temptation could have had," and she thought of the prodigal son.

"Leavitt is charming—altogether a most unusual man. But don't let him alarm you, mother. If half a dozen crazy negroes and a handful of white loafers should come here to disturb us I should know how to meet them."

"Riots are not pleasant things at any time, John."

Tremaine nodded.

"I have seen them when they were very serious indeed."

His mother, betrayed into sudden interest, glanced at him and exclaimed :

"When was that, John ?"

Her son settled himself comfortably, blew away the smoke of his cigarette, and began :

"It was in the Soudan, some three hundred miles up the Nile above Khartoum. Two of us white chaps were in our camp with half a dozen native boys. One of our men had alarmed some women washing in the river, and that night we were awakened by cries of an angry mob. When we left our tents, we saw a hedge of armed warriors around the corral."

Tremaine paused. His mother, who had never been a traveler, had never made so distant a journey as she did now in her imagination. Virginia, Riverside, the sitting-room with the stag's head over the chimney, vanished. She was transported up a mysterious river. A thrill ran through her. She was listening to John's

indolent, agreeable voice. She was to hear something of his mysterious history, something of the fifteen unknown years. He continued :

“ You can imagine, mother, that the situation required delicacy. The creatures were armed to the teeth. The gun which I snatched up was not loaded—however, one shot would have been fatal to us all. There was moonlight, and the boys had lighted the big torches we flared around the camp to ward off wild animals. The man with me, who in fact was running the expedition, just then caught sight of a native whose face was familiar to him. The nigger had been gored by an elephant some fifteen miles up the river, and my friend had cleaned out the wound and fixed him up generally. He had the presence of mind to call the man by name, make him come out from the ranks, and he talked to him in a jargon which he never knew he could speak. Then he made them a little address by means of this interpreter. The nigger had learned a little English at the Gordon College in Khartoum, but the call of the blood had been too strong for him and he had gone back to savagery.”

Again Tremaine laughed, as he remembered.

“ Well, it succeeded beautifully for us, and the riot turned out to be a tea-party. We gave them presents of all the tea and sugar we had. It was a very expensive evening for us. We had to return to Khartoum for provisions, but we kept our skins.”

“ What did your friend say to them ? ” Mrs. Tremaine asked.

"Oh, a lot of rubbish, no doubt ; but at the time it was nothing less than inspiration."

She said no more, and, half musing, John added :

"I am not afraid of the Virginia darkies and, in any event, you will be safe in the North. Your train leaves at seven to-morrow night, doesn't it ?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Tremaine, as she ascended the stairs to her own room.

He sat alone in the sitting-room before the stag's head, musing. The incident he told his mother brought the Soudan forcibly back to him and the details of this little expedition, when he had gone up to make a new city of Sorgun. He himself had gone in alone, with the handful of Soudanese replacing an Englishman whose job the building of the new city should have been. In Khartoum, Tremaine, restless and homesick, had accepted this excursion, offering to hold the position until Adams should come along. When in due season Adams did come along, the hard breaking-in of the district had been accomplished. The neighboring tribes of natives had become friendly, and Tremaine had become practically king of the little province. He had given the glory to Adams and gone on up the river. Thinking of the past, he smoked tranquilly. Soudan was far away . . . he was in Virginia. . . .

How young his mother had looked to-night ! He could not believe she had been the mother of two men past youth. Her proud indifference only served to quicken his tenderness, and he felt the desire to pro-

tect her, to care for her. She was the only woman in his environment, and she pleased his beauty-loving eyes. She had hardly been a gracious companion to him, though always polite. He should miss her.

She had been more communicative with him lately, on the eve of her going away, and John had listened without comment to her enthusiastic admiration of David's children. He learned of his brother's commonplace successful career, and observed his mother's moved face when she spoke of her eldest son. He heard of his nephews, saw their pictures and the picture of David's wife.

Mammy came in before he went upstairs for the night and brought him a glass of fresh buttermilk. She rolled her eyes toward the ceiling.

"She-all gwine away to-morrow, Marse John."

"Didn't you expect that she would go, Mammy?"

"No, suh. I sho' didn't; I'se bin a muddah twice ovah, an' I reckon I know how dey feels."

"But she's going to her favorite son's wife, Mammy."

"An' her baby here ain't got nottin' at all."

John laughed.

"Don't you worry about that, you dear old thing. He has the 'faithfullest' soul on earth to keep him company."

The negress drew near to him, and recalling a habit she had in his infancy, she dropped on her knees at his feet, took his slippered foot in her lap, and nursed it.

"Marse John, yo' heah me; she don' wanna go Nawf one tiny mite."

"Ridiculous! That's your imagination, Mammy!"

"No, suh," said the negress emphatically. "When you-all goes up in de field, she jest sets in yo' room; seems like it comfort her to be there."

The wanderer looked at the old creature at his feet. Her loving hands that tended him through his boyhood. He remembered how she had stolen in on a cold winter night and rubbed his feet, when he was a boy. She said truly that she had borne many children. She had been the mother of twelve—all of them dead except Bob's father, a waiter in the North. She was maternal—her eyes, her breast, her magnetic hands. He leaned over to her.

"Mammy," he said, "why do mothers have favorite children?"

The old woman tried to put comfort in her smile.

"Lawd, Marse John," she murmured, "same reason as I had a favorite in dis house; sumpin' in one chile or anudder dat speaks to de heart."

"So you had a favorite?"

"Yes, sah," she beamed, "an' my chile done come home to roost!"

The following day he worked until noon with his men, and when he came in early, for it was his mother's last day, he found that she remained in her own room, where Mammy took her something to eat. At six o'clock, the old woman served supper for her mistress and John, and Mrs. Tremaine came down dressed for her journey. Her pallor and the marks of weeping on her face which she had not been able

to disguise touched him profoundly. He could scarcely look at her ; he felt that he took her at an unfair moment.

She wore a traveling dress and a small hat trimmed with violets. Bob was ready at the door with the carriage to take his mistress to the station. She touched her son's arm, and her lips were set.

"Don't go with me to the station, please. I wish to go alone. You will tell me good-by here."

He stooped and kissed her forehead. He knew her too well to protest, and in this moment of parting he seemed to have nothing to say, as he had had nothing to say for fifteen years. He watched her drive away from Riverside and re-entered the house slowly, going directly to his own room. On the way he passed his mother's apartment ; there was a trace of disorder from her recent departure and the delicate scent of lavender lingered on the air. About an hour afterwards, he came down to the lower rooms, wandered through them aimlessly, and going out on the porch, lit a cigarette and stood looking patiently into the summer twilight, lucid and clear. Katydid's were beginning to call, and he fancied that he heard in the distance, over the hills, the whistle of the Northern train where it passed the Corners. Evidently the train had been late, and his mother must have waited a long time at the station, for Bob had just driven into the barn.

As he stood smoking, he saw some one coming through the far gate of the avenue and up the road.

He could not believe his vision, and actually passed his hands across his eyes, not thinking that he saw distinctly. But there was no doubt about it—it was his mother! He ran down the steps to meet her.

“Mother, what has happened? Are you ill? Have you missed your train?”

Mrs. Tremaine had lost something of her calm. Her cheeks were flushed under her veil, and her shining eyes were more blue than gray. Her hand trembled, and her son drew it through his arm. She spoke breathlessly:

“I have not walked so far as this—in years. . . . Slowly, John. . . . Let me catch my breath.”

She leaned on him as, wondering and bewildered, he led her up the path. With its single lighted window, the old house waited to receive its mistress back after her short journey, and at the foot of the steps, just as John had paused the night of his return, so she stood uncertain, waiting before going up. He seemed to look down upon her from a great height, but there was tenderness in his eyes, and she was not too blind to see the beauty of his look.

“I could not leave Virginia,” she said simply, “I am too old. You will give me hospitality a little while, John?” she faintly smiled. “Or I can ask Mr. Leavitt to look me out a little house later,” and her son replied sharply, impatiently:

“Ah, don’t spoil it by saying such a thing. If you will do me the honor of sharing my home with

me . . .” And, still leaning on his arm, they went up the steps together.

Before they had crossed the door-sill, she had recovered her control. Mammy was in the kitchen singing, and her song came out with a melancholy plaint:

“ Hard times, hard times,
Come again no mo’”

That night in his room, Tremaine saw the reflection of his mother’s light that cast its long ray between the shutters out upon the lawn, and for the first time it seemed a beacon to the wanderer.

CHAPTER XI

THERE had been no uprising, and Tremaine, though a just, uncompromising master, kept harmony on his own place. No Italian left his shanty after dark, and during the nights, many a time the foreman and himself stood with their rifles watching by the river. One day John saw the last hay cart, rocking with its burden, driven through the fields. The sun was blinding, but with his big hat shading his dark face, a rake in his hand, he walked contentedly along the river. The red clay banks were bright with grass which the heat of summer had burnt crimson and yellow; the cattails hung their golden fringe along the shore. When he was a boy, he had used to bring his canoe down the stream, and as he stood for a moment looking at the current and remembering the thrill it had been to paddle and stem it, around the corner there came a canoe with a girl's figure in it. He saw her vainly try to stem the current and called out:

"Let your boat drift; don't paddle!" Isobel Malvern instinctively obeyed, and the canoe swung and came drifting.

"I want to make the shore; I must make the shore here."

Then Tremaine remembered a little waterfall about a hundred yards further, by the old sawmill, and realized

that she must indeed make the shore. She tried to catch her paddle in the stones, the slender thing snapped, and John climbed down the bank, plunged into the river up to his knees, where the stern of her boat was within his reach. He pulled her to the shore, gave her his hand, helped her up the bank, and drew the little boat after them. From under her summer hat she looked at him with interest.

"I thought the river would be low, and I have often made the bank further up. My man is coming to take the canoe back with him on the buckboard. Bob will show him where it lies."

She wore a linen dress, cool and white, belted at the waist with a white ribbon, in which was thrust a bunch of sweet peas. Her shoes, skirt, hat, and flowing veil were all of the same fair whiteness; her frank eyes rested on him kindly, and she spoke as though to an inferior.

"Do you think of walking to the house?" he asked.

"Yes, I understand Mrs. Tremaine is still at home. I know the way quite well," she replied.

"That may be, but I don't think Mr. Tremaine would care to have you go alone," he said sharply. "As I am going to the house, I'll follow along."

Miss Malvern, although she had not seen fit to speak to Mrs. Tremaine of her second meeting with the workman, had thought of him, nevertheless. His calm, masterful demeanor, his strong personality, had awakened her interest. In a troubling way it crossed her mind to her annoyance, and she had tried to forget him.

Of the new master of Riverside many things had been told her. The fact that a Tremaine with energy and purpose had returned to Virginia with an idea of building up the property had interested Redlands.

The farmer and Miss Malvern started along the river path. He followed a little distance behind, his rake over his shoulder. She kept on tranquilly along the river, which rippled over the stones toward the falls. She stopped for a second and as Tremaine drew near to her, she asked :

“Is the hay all in?”

Leaning on his rake, amused, he looked at her frankly. He had been watching with pleasure the butterfly-like white thing that floated before him over the red path in the summer day.

“The last load’s just been driven in.”

“Are Mr. Tremaine’s Italians good for anything?” she asked.

“They garden, build stone walls and masonry; they work like bees.”

“Oh,” she exclaimed with disdain, “Northerners think there is nothing but work in the world, unless perhaps it’s money,” and glancing at him, she said : “I suppose you’re a New England farmer.”

“No,” he replied slowly, “the last farming I did was in Africa.”

Now she turned to him directly with undisguised interest. Here was an unusual man, and no doubt this was the reason why he was in the employ of Mr. John Tremaine.

"But that must have been an interesting life," she exclaimed with animation. "Far more exciting than working in Virginia on a broken-down, forgotten farm."

This description of Riverside touched him and he exclaimed :

"Oh, do you think of it in that light?"

"Everybody was surprised when Mr. Tremaine bought it. It will require a fortune to build it up." Then she added, with sweetness: "But I should not discourage one of Mr. Tremaine's workmen."

"You don't discourage me," said the farmer, taking off his hat and wiping his forehead with a handkerchief very unlike a workman's. Isobel's quick eyes observed it, and she looked at him sharply. A suspicion crossed her mind but died when she remembered what people said of Mr. Tremaine. It couldn't be. This man was only an unusual laborer.

She continued her walk, the farmer following behind her. In front of them, along the river, the Italian shanties huddled, a cluster of rough dwellings. Down by the river a big Italian, nude to the waist, was washing his linen and singing :

"Ah, mia bella Napoli!"

Miss Malvern once more stopped in her walk and turned to the man behind her.

"Are the Italians afraid of the niggers?"

"They are not cowards," he answered; "and they are not afraid of work either, although they come from the South."

She exclaimed resentfully :

" If Mr. Tremaine thinks he can teach us lessons down here in Virginia, I think he'll find himself mistaken," and she looked him directly in the eyes and saw that they were like Mrs. Tremaine's, turning from blue to gray.

She blushed, started to speak, " Why, you're . . ." then asked quickly : " What is Mr. Tremaine like ? "

" He is like any other man. I don't see any difference," the farmer answered indifferently, and without pressing the question, she continued her walk.

Presently they passed a group of Italians working in the fruit gardens, and beyond, further on, they struck into the path that led to the rear of the property, and there John left Isobel.

That afternoon, when Isobel finished the game of draughts she had been playing with Mrs. Tremaine and pushed the board away, she said :

" Dearest, your son has an extraordinary man-of-all-work. I have met him working in the fields."

Mrs. Tremaine flushed brilliantly.

The girl continued :

" He tells me he has been in Africa ; he rides like a cowboy."

" Then you have spoken with him again, Isobel ? "

And Miss Malvern told her friend of both the meetings, speaking with a pretty excitement, leaning forward across the board.

" It is unlike a Malvern to talk with workmen, Isobel."

The girl shrugged. "That's the strange part of it ; I don't think him a common workman."

She was lovely as she talked, facing the older woman, and across Mrs. Tremaine's brow a shadow fell. She heard Mammy speaking on the porch and called to her.

"Will you tell Mr. John that Miss Malvern is staying for supper ? Bob must put the horse and buckboard in the stable and give Tim something to eat."

"Yaas, ma'am, Mis' Molly."

Isobel continued as though she had not been interrupted :

"This common laborer has ideas about the South which need a little rectifying."

"I hope he didn't run down Virginia," said Mrs. Tremaine with a touch of asperity.

"What is the workman's name ?"

Mrs. Tremaine ignored the question. "The place is full of Italians and niggers now. It is not fit for a woman to cross. Please don't ride round that way any more. Come by the road."

Isobel said : "I am so curious. I can't help it. I want to see Mr. John Tremaine."

Her voice was clear as a bell and soft with the Southern accent.

"I know you are proud of him, and of what he is doing in Riverside. Is he like you ? I am dying to see him ! What is the mystery that surrounds him ?"

There was about the girl a peculiar sense of youth and unspoiled womanhood. She avoided addressing her friend "Mrs. Tremaine." It would have put a barrier

of formality between them, and her loving heart felt it would spoil the intercourse of one woman with another and suggest the thought of age. Mrs. Tremaine answered musingly :

“ He is not the least like David.”

“ David was handsome. Is Mr. John Tremaine as good-looking ? ”

“ You shall see him to-night, Isobel, and then you can judge.”

“ Tell me, is he dark or blond ? ” She put her hand lovingly on her friend’s arm. “ Just think ; you have a son of whom I know nothing ! I believe he is like you.”

Mammy’s voice was again heard speaking in the hall, and Isobel felt a curious thrill when a man’s voice answered the colored woman, and she murmured : “ Now we shall see ! ”

Mrs. Tremaine waited calmly. The fact that her son worked in the fields now like a day laborer no longer humiliated her, for the day she made her decision to remain, she inclined gracefully before fate. She never did anything half-way ; she loved or hated, liked or disliked, and never made half a concession. She glanced at the doorway but, instead of her son’s figure, Mammy’s portly person blocked the aperture.

“ Please, ma’am, Mis’ Molly, Marse John he do say like he’s terrible sorry, but he sure can’t come to supper to-night, nohow.”

Mrs. Tremaine asked sharply :

“ Why, pray ? ”

"He sure done say he got to go down to de meddars wid Bob and get in a load ob hay. Dar's a storm comin'."

Miss Malvern cried incredulously :

"Hay at night? Why, no one ever heard of such a thing; and, dearest, if there's a storm coming, I must go home at once."

The girl went over to the window and drew the shade.

"There's no storm; it's a false alarm."

"Marse John, he done say there's a stawm comin'."

Peering into the August night, the girl asked humorously : "Is he infallible?"

"Yaas, ma'am, Miss Isobel," returned the old woman, without having the least idea what the word meant. "He am de fallibelest gemmen I ever did see."

Both Mrs. Tremaine and Isobel laughed, and the girl repeated : "The idea of haying in the night! I am sure that is a caprice he has taken from his farm hand."

She came over and put her arm around Mrs. Tremaine, and murmured, close to her cheek :

"He is awfully dark, like an Indian, isn't he, and he has your eyes? He is tall and straight, and his face is stern. He must have wonderful adventures to tell of. I have seen him."

Mrs. Tremaine put up her hand and touched the girl's face.

"Listen," she said, "there is the thunder." A heavy sound rolled in the distance.

"And he is infallible, too. You see, there comes his storm."

CHAPTER XII

JOHN laid away his workman's clothes, ceased to be a farmer, and turned, with the same interest that had characterized his agricultural efforts, to the opening of the Blythe Mountain Coal Mines.

He had been skirting Blythe Mountain, planning with his engineers the sinking of the shaft, indicating sites for miners' houses, and he was walking slowly home across the evening fields, swinging his stick, musing upon the material success that met him everywhere, and contrasting it with the arid loneliness of his own life.

He came up to the bars of the old South Pasture gate. Behind him were the high-grown, grassy meadows of the Malvern property, an estate now as run-down as his own had been, and with less likelihood of ever being reclaimed. The landscape lay soft and lovely under the light of the Southern evening. The old house stood on a rise of ground, behind a forest of oaks and beeches; to the left ran the river, sunk low between its red banks, and over all spread the pale sky in which, toward the west, hung the evening star.

John lit a cigar and leaned on the bars, remembering as he did so how, fifteen years ago, on just such a summer night, he had leaned on this old silvery fence, his heart sore within him.

His passions were strong and deep, but his will met them at every turn and chained them. From the hour he knew that Julia had broken faith with him, he had resolutely cut her out of his thoughts. A photograph of her between her sons was on his mother's bureau in her room, and he had seen that she was still beautiful. The picture had struck him like a blow, and over and over again he had forced himself to look at it until he could do so without emotion. He had become a cynic and a misanthrope, bitter and distrustful toward women. On the day he ran away from home, she had been singing at Riverside in the old room, and he distinctly recalled every word of the song :

“ I ask no gold to gild my store,
For heavy cares with riches come.
I want one sole thing more and more —
I want your love to follow me, follow me home.”

Ten years later, in a drawing-room in Johannesburg, the wife of a colonel in the army had sung this same song, in a voice as charming as Julia Tremaine's had been. This woman sang it to John Tremaine, and he had loved her—or thought he loved her—for two or three years. As he smoked now, leaning on the fence, he remembered this woman and how she had died of fever in the plains, whilst her husband was away in England. “ Follow me, follow me home ”—the memory had poignancy and sadness. There were other memories, and they followed after; but they were fleeting and could not hold him. He threw down

his half-smoked cigar, trod it out into the dry grass, and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking toward the river paling to gray as the evening sky grew cold.

Well, love had not followed him home. He had brought success back to Virginia, he would leave upon it the same mark of a strong man's power that he had left everywhere he went. But what could it do for him in return?

His attitude of mind had created a spirit of harmony between his mother and himself. But as far as he was concerned, he would be obliged to content himself within the boundaries of his home. There was nothing for him outside.

He was so intent on his own thoughts that he did not hear the approach of some one over the long grass, and he started when a voice at his side said authoritatively, with a little laugh behind the words:

"Will you let down the bars, please?"

Tremaine turned to see Isobel, who, in a summer dress, hatless, stood with one hand on her hip and the other held out to him frankly, smiling at him.

"Mr. Tremaine," she said, "I think we have met several times before."

He lifted his hat and shook hands with her.

"I am afraid my disguise was not very successful. You really knew me all the time, didn't you?"

"Was it a disguise?" said Isobel Malvern. "They looked like very honest clothes—you seemed a very honest workman."

"I was all that," said Tremaine; "but what finally gave me away to you?"

She laughed. "Your handkerchief," she said.

"Not my manners?"

"They were rather bad, to tell you the truth. Have you any better ones?"

Tremaine smiled. "They say I am a hard master, do they?"

"Yes." She looked at him with frank liking and interest.

"Long before I saw you as a workman I met you down here, in the old pasture. Do you remember, Mr. Tremaine?"

He laughed.

"Do you really remember?"

"I cried," said Isobel, frankly; "I think you dried my tears."

Tremaine laughed. "I did more! I kissed you and set you down. How fast you ran away!"

"Not so far as you did. Do you remember?"

He made no reply.

"My Mammy told me one night when she put me to bed: 'Marse John Tremaine's done run away.' It frightened me—'runnin' away' seemed such a wild thing to do—and for years I seemed to see you running, running. And now," she added, smiling charmingly, "you've come home!"

They were walking on the little path that wound about through the pastures and meadows up the hill slope that rose softly toward Malvern House. He was

tempted to walk home with her. It was long since he had walked like this, side by side with a graceful young woman, charming, sympathetic, and free. She charmed him, she gave him pleasure, but he knew that she was absolutely forbidden fruit. He stopped and stood looking at her, half thoughtful, half smiling. He knew that she expected him to finish the walk with her, and from now on, he would have to begin to play the part of the boor, the rude indifferent man.

"Yes," he said shortly, "I've come home—the inveterate bad penny that turns up some time or other—the rolling stone that finally rattles down-hill and stops. Good-evening, Miss Malvern."

He lifted his hat and extended his hand and bade her good-by abruptly, and the girl continued her homeward way through the summer meadows alone.

Mrs. Tremaine was cutting the leaves among her honeysuckle vines when, the following afternoon, Isobel rode over, and after giving her horse to Bob, ran up to the porch and threw her arms around her friend's neck.

"Have you heard?"

Mrs. Tremaine had heard much. She had heard many things she would have been glad to forget.

"Nothing very new or interesting, Isobel."

"Really, have you not been told?"

"Nothing that could make me smile as you are smiling, my dear child."

Isobel flushed delightfully.

"The great event has occurred, dearest, and quite naturally. I have met your mysterious son."

Mrs. Tremaine put her shears and her basket, full of leaves and blossoms, on the table, and the two women took their places where one afternoon before John and Mr. Malvern had sat and talked together.

"You have met John?" asked the mother.

"Yes," nodded Isobel, holding her riding crop across her knees, "down in the South Pasture; he stood there by the fence smoking, and looking just as a returned traveler should look. He is not a bit terrible."

Mrs. Tremaine could not freely meet Isobel's smile without answering it.

"I believe he can be terrible."

Isobel did not seem to hear her.

"We had a delightful time, dearest. He remembered me as perfectly as I remembered him."

"Isobel!" exclaimed Mrs. Tremaine. "You remembered John?"

The girl laughed. "I remember meeting him before he went away from Virginia—down in the old pasture, just where I met him yesterday."

Mrs. Tremaine looked at her incredulously.

"You are dreaming. You were a baby."

"I remember—I always remember; and I think he is perfectly charming."

Isobel's enthusiasm and the fire in her eyes, her eager interest, her appreciation of John, had a dual effect upon Mrs. Tremaine. The girl's praise was balm, but she could not let herself enjoy it. She knew from the very first that John could not but charm a woman.

"We walked up through the fields," continued Isobel. "We talked together as if we had known each other all our lives!"

Mrs. Tremaine put her hand to her heart.

"You are pale," exclaimed Isobel, drawing near to her. "Are you ill?"

"It's the heat, and the odor of the vines is so powerful."

Isobel touched her hand, and her eyes wandered from her friend. Mrs. Tremaine watched her face and saw that she beamed, still smiling as she thought of John Tremaine.

"Why, she has fallen in love with him at first sight!" thought the mother. Then she gathered herself together, and taking advantage of the fact that her emotion had aroused Isobel's alarm, said to her:

"My dear child, the doctor tells me that I must take a rest cure. I shall be obliged to be very quiet and see no one for several weeks."

"Oh, that does not mean me, dearest?"

"Every one, for a time."

"Let me come and be your nurse; let me take you to Malvern."

Mrs. Tremaine fortified herself for her task and finally succeeded in persuading Isobel of the fact that she must not come to Riverside until Mrs. Tremaine should send for her.

When she bade Isobel good-by finally, she saw that the brightness was gone from the girl's face, and her heart smote her.

When John came in that evening dressed for dinner, he wore in the lapel of his coat a little bunch of meadow-sweet. Mrs. Tremaine had seen the same flowers in Isobel's belt that afternoon.

"John," she said, "you did not tell me that you had met Isobel Malvern at last."

"You knew that I have met her several times; we have already proved to each other several things of importance."

"What things?"

"That the man must not be judged by the cloth he wears."

"Why did you not tell her frankly who you were, the first time you saw her in the fields?"

"It amused me," he said, "and I am not often amused."

He saw his mother's agitation, but did not take pity on her.

"She is a more agreeable companion than her father," said John; "and after all, the third time she knew me for a gentleman, in spite of overalls and a flannel shirt."

His mother saw that he was slipping into one of his ungracious moods, and it facilitated her task. She said quietly:

"I have asked Isobel not to come to Riverside again for the present."

He waited a few seconds, then said slowly:

"So she told me."

"Told you, when?"

"We met in the South Pasture just now, when I came in. I put down the bars for her once again."

And she had given him the meadowsweet.

He saw her clasp her hands, and there was a sob in her throat.

On that evening they dined almost in silence and, when his mother retired soon after returning to the living-room, John said harshly :

"Do not give yourself any uneasiness regarding my sentimental complications in Riverside. I shall be gone before long, and I promise you that Isobel Malvern and myself will remain as complete strangers as we are now."

Isobel, however, had no such intention in her mind.

The relation between Malvern and his daughter was very close. Isobel had tried to replace her mother, and it was a bitter thing to Malvern not to be able to give her everything in the world. With her breeding and her looks, he felt that Isobel should make a brilliant marriage, and the fact that he could not give her a fortune was galling to him.

Isobel quickly saw that, for some reason, she could not talk to her father about John Tremaine, and her own feelings soon made it difficult for her to mention his name.

But one day she took courage and asked him :

"What do you think of Mr. Tremaine, Daddy?"

"I don't think about him at all," returned Malvern shortly. "Why do you ask me?"

They had finished dinner and had come out together into the library.

"It's only natural I should ask, isn't it? He is becoming a personage in the district. Besides, he's the son of my dearest friend. And then, he's a romantic figure. People don't return after fifteen years' absence every day, and when they do, they usually come back paupers and burdens on their families, and not like Mr. Tremaine."

"Well," and her father looked at her sharply, "just how has he come back?"

"Rich and successful."

"When did you see him?"

And Isobel, instantly on guard, answered indifferently:

"I met him this afternoon." She continued:

"You knew him as a boy, didn't you, father?"

"As a young man, yes, in the bank."

"He was gloomy then, they say, reserved and unhappy?"

"I know nothing of him now, but a man who begins life by running away from home usually keeps something of acridness in his character."

During the next few weeks, Malvern thought of John Tremaine against his will. He came up against this new citizen at every turn, but curiously enough it did not occur to him to be suspicious about his daughter.

The following week, Leavitt dined alone with Malvern, who said to him:

"John Tremaine's return, Leavitt, is a singular event, isn't it?"

Throughout the dinner, Riverside and its occupants had not been mentioned.

Leavitt lifted his fine eyebrows. "I assure you that I was never so surprised by anything in my life."

The lawyer spoke as if those startling happenings were everyday affairs with him, whereas nothing could have been more unruffled or more devoid of incident than his peaceful existence. The two men were friends of long standing; they had ridden, smoked, talked, dined, and uncommunicatively suffered together, for a good part of a lifetime, as neighbors do in far-off country districts.

In every crisis of the county, these two faithful souls had stood together, and in the personal crises of their own lives, they remained sympathetic companions. They sat before the open window, smoking their cigars, like two old campaigners with their memories behind them. These after-dinner chats were frequent occurrences. They seemed to sit again in the glow of former bivouac fires.

"He is going to be," said Leavitt, "the most important figure in Virginia, sir."

The lawyer's voice had the charming cadence of a soft old song. His gentle nature and the delicate quality of his mind lent grace to everything he said. Malvern, although a financial failure himself, never quite forgave Leavitt for not being a success. Malvern's fortune had been swept away in a money crisis, when he was past the age to recoup himself. But Leavitt, throughout his quiet life, had been distinctly an

unsuccessful man—a state of affairs never forgiven by one's friends.

"I have had an extraordinary conversation with Tremaine since he returned," said Malvern, "and I trust I shall not find it necessary to meet him often."

"Malvern," said the lawyer, "I think your point of view is cruel. The John Tremaine who ran away from Redlands is a different person from the John Tremaine of to-day. His character has been purified and redeemed by fifteen years of struggle."

"I confess that there was much in the boy who ran away that charmed me," said Malvern. "To tell you the truth, I preferred him to David; and when I discovered that he was a thief, it was one of the most surprising revelations I ever had in my life."

"Poor Molly," murmured the lawyer.

"The man I saw recently," said Malvern sternly, "was an arrogant, self-important parvenu."

Leavitt leaned forward in his chair.

"By gad, Redmond! If you say that, you didn't see John Tremaine."

"Your affection for the family blinds you, Sam."

Leavitt poured himself out a glass of Madeira and drank it slowly. "I think I see more keenly, because I am so near to them—both. I was frightfully prejudiced against John, but I can't keep it up. You couldn't either, if you knew him. There's something about him . . ."

Malvern laughed.

"Plausible pulls the wool over people's eyes."

"Now this Blythe Mountain coal affair," Leavitt straightened himself in his chair, "is a big enterprise, Malvern."

"Can you take interest in any enterprises, Sam, when they are in the hands of a thief?"

Leavitt stirred.

"Don't call him that," he said gently. "Fifteen years ago we all buried that story" (he pointed over his shoulder) "in my little office—you and David and his mother and me."

Malvern poured himself out a glass of wine and drank it.

"He had the effrontery," he continued, "to offer me the presidency of the Blythe Mountain Coal Company. You can understand that I refused."

"You did?"

"Don't you see that it was only a bribe?"

There was a silence for a moment. Leavitt said: "I don't regard this as you do."

Malvern smiled slowly. "Perhaps he offered you an option to buy two thousand shares of stock?"

A faint color lay on the lawyer's cheeks; the Madeira had begun it, and Malvern's words deepened it. He met his friend's eyes clearly.

"He did."

Malvern leaned forward and put his hand on his friend's knee. "You did not take it, sir," he said defiantly.

"I did not take it; but," he continued hotly, "it's

money made out of Virginian soil, by a concern handled by honorable gentlemen."

"My gad!" said Malvern, staring at his friend and dropping back into his chair.

If Leavitt had ever entertained the smallest doubt regarding his own motives, Malvern's attitude and the Virginian sense of honor would have intensified it now.

CHAPTER XIII

ONE day John spoke of Julia.

"What sort of a wife did Julia make for David?"

Mrs. Tremaine, glad to have him show an interest in the family, answered:

"One never really knows very much about married lives. I always felt that no one was good enough for David."

She waited a moment and John said:

"It would naturally seem so to you."

He did not pursue the question, understanding there had been no extravagant happiness in the marriage; but Mrs. Tremaine, interested, continued:

"I think no one but myself understood David's sensitive, exquisite nature, shy and reserved."

There was no enthusiasm on the part of her son.

"David was so noble, such a marvelous character, his rectitude . . ."

John, where he was sitting, reached out for a pamphlet on French peas.

It was in his mother's mind what pleasure it would give her and satisfaction, if John would now speak of his brother, refer in some delicate way to him, showing thus that he remembered David's sacrifice; but John said nothing. As his mother looked away, John saw the tenderness on her face, the rising color on her deli-

cate cheeks. He knew what her griefs had been and how she had worshipped this beloved elder son. His face clouded.

"He was a stainless judge," said his mother. "I remember some one said of him at the Century Club that to no judge could the term 'Your Honor' be more properly applied."

"Julia makes at all events an excellent mother," remarked John. Mrs. Tremaine answered, and her voice was cold :

"Yes," she said, "she is an excellent mother," and then added, after a second :

"I have always believed that a woman rarely is an excellent mother as well as an excellent wife. I do not criticize Julia ; she has a cold nature."

By October of the same year, in Redlands and the district down the river, as far as Craig's Corners, all the way to Richmond, John Tremaine had created a sensation.

Money, energy, and talent had done wonders in these few months. John conceived a plan in the morning and if possible executed it before night. He had arrived in June ; in August he discovered coal ; the same month the Blythe Mountain Coal Company was formed, and by the autumn the first shaft was begun.

Before the house the big avenue was graveled and widened ; there was a new roof on the homestead, and the house shone in snowy white and green.

The vines had grown crimson on the trellises. Corn had grown sweet and had been gathered ; hay had been

cut and stored. There was comparative peace between the negroes and Italians, and black and white now worked together under John's stern and just management.

The mines interested him. It was the realization of a dream; but the fields, the property itself, were like jewels to him—rich treasure houses, full of promise.

The vague stories regarding his youth appeared to be entirely forgotten, and the mysteries surrounding him in the past were blotted out. Rumors came to Redlands of the South African Tremaine, the Virginian who had returned unexpectedly to his country.

The Irishman's worship of his master, Mammy's adoration, Samuel Leavitt's slow, decided approval of the stranger, his daily presence under her roof, his courtesy and consideration for her, all drew his mother to him. The pride that had suffered through John in the past was being assuaged by John in the present. She was growing keen for John, tender for John, ambitious for John; and hourly it became impossible to bring before herself any situation which could put him in the wrong.

Lonely herself—though she was not altogether lonely now—she began to understand his loneliness. Watching his silhouette as he sat in the window, his handsome head outlined against the light, she wondered more than once what woman's hands had drawn his head to her breast, and she grew to be jealous of him and for him. How she would now resent any one who wounded him or gave him pain! Often she called her

growing affection weakness and blamed herself; but the memory of his crime no longer haunted her.

John urged his mother to extravagances. New things came to her almost daily from the North. He took her about the country in a motor and showed her portions of the hills she had never known. Her life slipped into easy ways. The Tremaine property lifted its head, and whenever Mrs. Tremaine heard anything in her son's favor, she warmed toward the world.

Throughout the following months, the friendship between mother and son ripened and they grew nearer to each other every day. Mrs. Tremaine's heart stirred with the stories of John's adventures and she longed to make him forget his lonely years.

Meanwhile, Isobel, unable to bear the exile from Riverside, had gone North with her father, and there was no one to disturb the intercourse between mother and son—no woman to bring temptation in his way.

As the autumn approached once more, John's problems were more complicated; he became a greater, a more important Virginian. He was offered the nomination for Congress, and the question of his acceptance was agitated.

One afternoon, as he was directing some half-dozen Italians in the building of a greenhouse, he turned to see Isobel riding toward him across the fields. Without distinct rudeness he could not refuse to speak to her.

He heard Isobel say: "Good morning, Mr. Tremaine," as he went up to her. She leaned down gaily to him, holding out her hand in its riding-glove. She bent

from her saddle, sparkling and smiling. Tremaine knew in a moment, by the color in her face, by the darkening of her eyes, that she was glad to see him, and he knew in an instant that he was far too glad to see her.

The curves of her figure, and her beauty, so full of the joy of life, were the sweetest sight that had ever met his eyes. On her left cheek a tiny mole intensified the fairness of her skin.

The saddle leather creaked with the mare's breathing, and as Isobel leaned down, it seemed almost as if she leaned into John's arms.

He took her hand and looked at her, his heart beating quickly.

"Doesn't such a day make you want to ride, Mr. Tremaine?" she asked, and he answered:

"Oh, I use all my horses for the plough."

She let her hand slip down, along her mare's neck. She did not know what to say to him; she had thought constantly for weeks of seeing him again, and now he stood there, indifferent, with an expression that she had always thought his face could wear—one of coldness and almost disdain.

"You ought to be riding," she said. "The country is so beautiful; I seemed to ride through flame."

His look followed her as she glanced toward the warm fields.

"Virginia is the paradise of the world! I'm sure you thought it was, didn't you, when you came back from your wanderings?"

John answered her shortly :

"I thought of Virginia as little as possible during my wanderings, as you call them. I was absorbed in what I was doing. I generally am. I have a talent for forgetting the things that are not under my hand. I returned to Virginia for mercenary reasons purely."

If he had thought out what he could say to disenchant her, he could hardly have found better words. She drew a little breath of surprise and said :

"Oh !" then laughed and recovered herself.

"I am sorry," she said, "but I don't quite believe you. Not that I know you, of course, but the traits you mention are not Southern, are not like a Tremaine."

"That may be, but it is nevertheless true."

His curt rudeness did not ruffle her temper, and she continued to provoke him by her beauty and her good humor. She was not without experience. A beauty at sixteen, she had received much attention, and in the five years of social life she had constructed her own little philosophy of life. Her sensitive mind and her warm heart rendered her no mean match for a misanthrope.

"Women are not very keen observers, after all," she said ; "they say a woman sees only with one eye," and Tremaine asked, in spite of himself :

"How do you mean ?"

"She always has the other eye on the man she loves."

John stooped and picked up a stone at his feet. He threw it carelessly ; it hit a tree and the hollow and rotten wood rang out.

"You mean she keeps an eye on the *men* she loves," he said rudely.

She laughed. "Of course, we are born faithless."

"Well, you are the only woman whom I have ever heard acknowledge that," he smiled. "Aren't you riding over to see my mother?"

"Yes," she said, "and I can scarcely wait. You know, I have been away nearly ten months."

Tremaine raised his eyebrows as he said: "As long as that?" but showed no other interest.

She walked her mare slowly and talked down to him cheerfully, but he had the grace to accompany her and she ignored his unfriendly humor.

"Since I have come back, I have heard nothing but 'John Tremaine' on all sides," she said. "My father tells me that you are the most popular man this side of Richmond."

"With the exception of your father, Mr. Leavitt, and a few others, there are only niggers and white trash in this part of the country."

"Nonsense, Mr. Tremaine! You forget Craig's Corners, ten miles down the river, with a population of a thousand people—all of them crazy at election time."

He asked sceptically:

"You don't mean to say you are interested in politics?"

She answered steadily:

"I am interested in everything about Virginia. I had to go to Europe again to know what a good patriot I was. Look at this."

She drew the mare up and pulled from the breast of her riding-coat a little gold locket, holding it before his eyes. Her chin was lifted so that the fine contour of her neck and cheek were as clear cut as though carved from coral.

"Do you know what is in that locket, Mr. Tremaine?"

"What a coquette she is!" he thought and answered:

"No doubt the picture of one of your victims."

She let the locket fall, saying:

"I shall not tell you."

His continued rudeness had taken off the edge of her good humor, but as Tremaine saw her changed countenance and realized his brutality, he said with compunction:

"Please do tell me what is in the locket."

They had passed the Italian shanties, where his model gardens began, and her voice was cold when she spoke again.

"You have done wonders with Riverside. It must have been a fine sensation to have regenerated the property."

He put his hand on Netty's bridle and held her still.

"What is in the locket?"

"I do not wonder you are so popular. Father says they will make you go to Congress."

"What is in the locket?"

Its golden disc lay on her breast against her tan coat. Tremaine reached up and took the ornament between his fingers.

"I shall open it."

She bent down closely to him, and her hair nearly touched his. She sat serenely while his clumsy fingers trembled, but he managed to open the locket and under its glass saw rough grains that looked like sand. She nodded and laughed triumphantly.

"The soil of Virginia! I carry it everywhere. I seem to feel the beating of my country's heart on mine. Of course, you think me awfully silly, don't you, Mr. Tremaine? I suppose I am." And she caught up her reins, spoke to Netty, and started away from him.

He did not follow her, but let her go, turned back in the way they had come, and struck into the forest farther on by the pool; it was late when he returned to the house. Isobel had been gone some time, and he found that Leavitt was to share the evening meal.

After this, on every occasion of his meeting with Isobel, he took pains—so it seemed to her—to be harsh and rude. At first she thought she had never seen so charming a person, but she was finally forced to acknowledge that she had never seen so ungracious a man.

Since returning, she had been several times to Riverside, and Tremaine had not been able always to avoid her. That was the word—avoid. She saw that he purposely avoided her. He created an atmosphere wherever he went—his personality was so strong—and she could not but find it strange that he should take the trouble to go out of his way to make her uncomfortable. Sometimes she tried to recall the evening

when they had walked back together to Malvern. The present Tremaine was not the same man who had talked to her that night so agreeably.

And yet, she admired him more and more. He drew her, and wherever she went, people spoke his name with admiration. She was at first piqued, and then her feelings made her suffer, and then it grew difficult to go to Riverside at all.

Mrs. Tremaine herself was embarrassed when John and Isobel met; and sometimes, when the girl sat alone with her friend, long silences would fall between them, and Isobel understood that the mother's heart was not at ease and this strange man and his strange humors affected the perfect friendship existing between the two women. Isobel hated him at times, but could not hate him long, and disturbing as his presence was, for nothing in the world would she have foregone the interest he held for her.

Malvern House upon its hill, surrounded by the unkempt, unproductive property, became like a watchtower from which Isobel viewed Riverside, the district, and her own little past. From her window she saw the rolling country, the river, and Blythe Mountain, on whose sides, through the autumn foliage, great swathes were out where the mines had been opened, and where the earth was tossed up by the men who had sunk the shaft. It was a noble hill, and it had been nobly scarred. John Tremaine had now been home two years.

The property of Riverside itself already showed the

results of order and method. Isobel saw the little clustered shanties of the Italians, where John had placed them in groups, down by the river. She saw the shacks that had been built at the mines for the miners. Strange people had come to help John Tremaine get riches out of the land.

Isobel had been a belle in Richmond for several seasons. Her picture had figured in the New York papers, and in New York itself, at several big functions, the Southern beauty had created a little storm. She felt, as she looked back on her conquests—for she had made them—that she knew something of life. But her heart had never been remotely touched, and as she put it to herself, she would never marry “until she was carried off her feet.” “She could not understand marriage in any other way,” she naively told the last man who had asked her to be his wife.

Now, down here in Virginia, the Virginia which she adored, within the boundaries of her home, in the place she loved the best, the Wonder had come to her. Isobel herself scarcely knew it. She was not prepared to admit to herself yet that she had fallen hopelessly in love, although she meditated on her state of mind far more than was good for her—was unhappy, began to lose her color and lived waiting for chance meetings with Mr. Tremaine and wondering what his moods would be.

When she was with Mrs. Tremaine, she waited tensely for some mention to be made of John, but Mrs. Tremaine never spoke of him. Isobel approached the house sometimes by way of the kitchen, and Mammy's

enthusiasms and eulogies were delightful to her. She loved to linger while the negress made marvelous pastry or washed and ironed fine little things for her mistress.

CHAPTER XIV

TREMAINE assumed the position of manager in chief of the operations of the Blythe Mountain Coal Company.

A little office, in reality nothing more than a cabin, was built for him down at the foot of the mountain, and there he established his headquarters.

His work often took him to Richmond, and sometimes to Washington and to New York ; but he never left Riverside, even for a day, without regret, and he always hurried back at the first opportunity. He had set himself to accomplish certain tasks within a given time, and he did not intend to lose any of that time.

In the autumn of the year following his return to Virginia, John found himself drawn into certain Richmond festivities. He had become very popular ; his figure could not remain unmarked. It amused and interested him to mingle in the social life of his own State, and, to some extent, he came out of his hermit-like seclusion and extended his hands to those extended to him. He found himself remaining in Richmond now and again for dinners ; the women liked him, and he was popular with the men. The warmth and hospitality of the South spread itself around him. They were hero-worshippers in Virginia ; they were

appreciative, and they were pleased to welcome back one of their own such as John Tremaine.

He bought two powerful hunters and occasionally went to the meets, riding over the autumn country by the side of some beautiful woman, who would have asked nothing better than to have charmed John Tremaine.

One evening he met Miss Malvern at a hunt dinner. He watched her at table and later found himself near her in a corner of the drawing-room.

Her greatest charm was the sense of youth she gave. She was like the vision of some budding tree in April, some young graceful branch in flower. Extremely slender, she had about her a certain boyish charm, with the grace of the adolescent woman. On Tremaine she had the effect of a spring day, of sunlight; and to him the effect was exhilarating.

As they stood alone together, he could not, without direct insult, ignore her, and Isobel had no intention of ignoring him.

"What a stunning horse you rode, Mr. Tremaine—there is nothing like her in the County."

"You think so?" said Tremaine, and added on a sudden impulse: "I will send her over to Malvern tomorrow. Ride her, will you? I shall not ride again for the present."

"We are not in Spain," said Isobel, "and I shouldn't think of accepting such a sacrifice on your part. I am sure you want to ride."

"Then you won't take her?"

She hesitated for a moment, then said frankly:

"I'll ride her with pleasure for a little while. It's good of you. Thanks."

"Otherwise she would stand in the stable and not even be exercised," he said ungraciously. "It's a kindness to the horse."

There was no one like him in the room, in his pink coat, dark good looks, coolness, and with just that force that attracts a woman.

In another second, some one came up and asked Isobel to dance. The man's name was not on her card. Tremaine stood calmly looking about the room, but Isobel hesitated and found herself saying :

"I am a little tired ; I think I will not dance this time."

Tremaine heard her and saw at that moment Malvern crossing the room toward them. He was stopped on the way by the guest of the evening—a banker from New York, in whose honor the dinner had been given.

The two men advanced together.

Tremaine, who had been a boor so often to Isobel, now turned to her with the charming smile she had seen but once—on the day they walked through the summer fields.

"I looked for you to-day at the hunt," he said. "Why did you not ride?"

He saw the color deepen in her cheeks at his interest, and his heart smote him.

"Oh, I don't hunt ; I never take fences."

"You sit your horse better than any of them. You must hunt. You will ride Wildcat, and I will teach

you to take fences. I thought every Southern woman rode cross-country ? ”

And she said quickly :

“ Perhaps you don’t know much about Southern women, Mr. Tremaine ? ”

At that moment, Malvern and the New York man came up together. Malvern greeted Tremaine ceremoniously, but the New York guest put out his hand to Tremaine with a cordiality that cast a glow over the group.

“ Well,” he exclaimed heartily, “ when my brother told me your name, I said to him : ‘ Do you mean to tell me it’s Big Tremaine ? ’ ‘ Virginia thinks he’s pretty big,’ my brother answered, and I told Henry that they didn’t half realize how big you are ! ”

Tremaine seemed annoyed. “ Nonsense ! ”

The banker turned to Malvern.

“ When I was out in Reekie a year ago—in South Africa, you know, Mr. Malvern—this John Tremaine was the only thing in sight. Diamond mines ; some gold, I think ; public institutions ; not to speak of charity.”

“ Oh, come,” said Tremaine. The older man put his hand on his shoulder.

“ And the deuce of the matter was,” he continued, “ that you were off on some miserable hunt or other, and I couldn’t meet you.”

“ Too bad,” said Tremaine.

“ You see, I was born in Virginia myself, and I was mighty proud to think a Virginian had made such a

mark in English territory; but I never thought we should meet like this, in Virginia, at a hunt ball."

In the distance, behind the palms, at the end of the room, the musicians began to play.

John turned to the girl, and although there was no name on her card resembling his, said to her:

"I think this is our dance."

It seemed to Isobel that she could scarcely believe her ears; the very notes of the music had for her a new, marvelous meaning. Her father's face hardened as she withdrew her hand from his arm and gave it to Tremaine. The other couples had begun to dance and he led her out upon the floor.

Tremaine's mare Wildcat ate her oats in one of the stalls of Malvern House stables. For reasons of her own, Isobel did not tell her father that she was riding John Tremaine's horse.

Tremaine himself apparently forgot his promise to teach her to ride cross-country, and after the hunt ball a week or two elapsed before she saw him again. Then, one October day, along the old red road by the river, she saw him coming toward her on horseback. She knew that unless he turned his back directly upon her, they would have to meet.

The dance with him at the hunt ball had comprised in its few short moments the greatest excitement of her life. They had danced well together; she had been proud to be his partner. He had not danced before that evening and did not again. When he gave her back

to her father, he had left the house almost immediately.

Now as he came up to her, she discovered in a moment that the agreeable mood in which she had last seen him was not to be repeated. He lifted his hat, but his face was cold and indifferent.

"Why don't you ride cross-country?" he asked her shortly. "I thought you Southern women were great riders?"

She smiled to herself at the fact that he went back so abruptly to their conversation in Richmond, just as though its thread had not been broken.

"Wildcat is a splendid animal," she said. "We try to take the best care of her, but she must go back to Riverside. I can't keep her any longer."

"As you like," he said coldly. "I shall not ride her again. I shall probably sell her in Richmond at the horse show."

He pursued his question: "Why don't you hunt?" and she answered, a little annoyed:

"I should not be surprised if you thought that I am afraid! Do you think so?" and he evaded impolitely:

"You wouldn't confess it if you were, would you?"

They halted their horses in the sandy road by the river bank. Below them the stream ran over its red bed, and the line of scarlet growth bordered it like a flame. To the left spread the fields; farther on the woodland cut across the property and ran deeply into the forests that skirted the mines; all the fences, save

one that marked the division between the Tremaine and the Malvern estates, had been razed to the ground ; there was nothing to mar or to break the beautiful stretch of fields from river to horizon.

The girl pursued :

“ You think I am afraid to jump ? ”

She sat and smiled at him from under her soft hat. The little mole on her cheek was lost in a flood of color. Her eyes were like clear wells, in which a man's soul might reflect itself, or from which a thirsty traveler might drink. He had a savage impulse to take her in his arms, to kiss her ruthlessly. The desire came upon him so brutally that he was brutal in his reply.

“ What, in heaven's name, does it matter what I think or do not think ? ”

Isobel could not know how severely he had judged himself for his weakness at the ball. She could not know that he had taken himself severely to task for the momentary indulgence of his feelings and for the fact that he was keeping his promise to his mother badly, and creating a situation which he knew was untenable for them both.

She bit her lip as though to silence herself, but then said, looking at him fearlessly :

“ My mother, one of the Southern women you did not know, was a famous cross-country rider. She was killed in a fall, taking a fence just below our farm. My father carried her home. I have given my word of honor not to ride cross-country.”

Tremaine, deeply ashamed, exclaimed :

"I beg your pardon. How could I know, how could I understand?"

Isobel retorted, throwing up her lovely head:

"How could you understand, indeed? You could not understand a woman. I don't know the kind of women you judge me by. You don't believe me even now—you think I am afraid."

She touched Wildcat with her whip and turning into the pasture, rode galloping at the old fence standing—Tremaine knew it—in rotten ground. He followed, but Wildcat was the better horse, and she paid no attention to his command to stop. Wildcat took the fence and for a second he saw Isobel and her horse in the air, then, as Wildcat came to the ground, one of her forefeet caught in a rabbit hole, and she fell.

CHAPTER XV

HE carried her to Malvern—a long seven miles—on his horse, and she lay in his arms, white and motionless. He had dashed water from the stream over her face and her hair, where it lay wet against her brows. Though the heaving of her breast was almost imperceptible, she was not dead. Under the heavy white lids, the blue of her eyes was dark. She was a mute reproach to him ; never could a woman speak to him more impressively than did this little, wounded girl. What a brute he had been to her !

The fire was gone from her now, as well as her mockery and wit. He had stamped out those sparks which had charmed him against his will. She was at his mercy now—her head against his breast. He rode slowly, cursing the ruts, picking his way, driving his horse with one hand and holding her as well as he might. He watched the handkerchief stained red, and breathed something like a prayer.

It failed to occur to him at this moment that she had only borne him out in his opinion of a woman's sense of honor : Isobel had broken her word to her father—she had been a moral coward in order to prove that she was not a physical one. What would Malvern say ? How could Tremaine face him with this burden in his arms ?

He scarcely knew how he reached the big house, or

who helped him, but he carried her up the steps and laid her upon the lounge, giving her up to her servants and her father. Tremaine left her with them, and after telephoning for his mother and for the doctor, went into the living-room to wait.

Here every object spoke of the little woman of the house. The opened piano with its scattered music, the work-stand with her work ; everywhere were arranged bunches of the autumn leaves. There were beautiful flowers, and he wondered, with a sudden jealousy, who had sent them to her.

While he walked to and from the door, it opened, and Malvern came up to him. On his face was an old anguish, revived and united with a new grief.

"She will live, sir," he said shortly. "I have telephoned to Richmond for the best man in the South. Your mother has just come."

Malvern turned aside to conceal his emotion, and John waited. In a few moments the father asked him :

"Now tell me how it happened ?"

Tremaine had never stood before a more unpleasant task.

"We were riding at the foot of the property," said John, "and I insisted upon knowing why she never rode cross-country."

Tremaine saw the red flush of anger rise again in Malvern's whitened cheeks.

"You did ?" cried the father. "What business was it of yours ?"

Face to face with the result of his brutal taunting,

quite conscious of his position in the father's eyes, Tremaine was too just to take offence.

"None of my business," he said quietly, "and I feel myself entirely to blame. Miss Malvern thought I doubted her courage. She has no end of courage."

"She does not need your appreciation of it." Malvern could hardly use his voice.

"Before I could prevent her, she rode at the fence between the properties, where the ground is rotten with rabbit holes, and the mare fell with her."

Torn with anxiety, shocked and unnerved, Malvern was not master of himself, and forgot that he was in his own house.

Before him stood a man whose moral weakness he despised; he was already beginning to think of him as a dangerous neighbor. He had watched his daughter dance with displeasure, and what Tremaine told him now whipped his feelings to fury.

"I hardly know how to speak to you, sir," he said with passion. "You speak of courage. In my youth men were not bred to taunt women."

Tremaine's breath came hard. He did not speak. He knew that in the next moment the father would ask him to leave the house forever, and he could not blame him.

That moment the door was opened by Mrs. Tremaine. Her entrance upon the scene was the gentlest interruption that could be made. She still wore her hat and furs. She came directly up to John and put her hand on his arm, but she spoke to Malvern, with tears in her eyes. Her face was full of sweetness.

"Isobel is conscious, and she insists on seeing John, and the doctor says that we cannot refuse her."

There was a silence. Malvern's ruddy color faded as swiftly as it had mounted to his cheeks. Mrs. Tremaine looked from one to another with a sinking heart.

Could it be possible, she thought, in this moment, when a human life hung perhaps in the balance, that there could be an altercation between her friend and her son?

Malvern's lips remained compressed with anger, but he motioned to John to go, and Mrs. Tremaine, without speaking, took her son's arm and led him from the room.

He asked his mother no questions. He saw that she was agitated, struggling for control. He felt that he was wholly to blame, but his anxiety and the love for Isobel which now overwhelmed him left no room for the feeling of self-reproach.

His mother opened the door of the darkened room, and before he knew it, he was standing by Isobel's bed.

They had bound her head professionally, and she suggested a young boy—a young soldier, carried in from the battle-field. The country doctor stood opposite.

As he looked down at her face, less deadly pale than when he had carried her from the field, he saw that only death could stamp out that individual spark in her which was such a keen delight to him. There on the finely chiseled lips hovered the most touching

spirit of a smile. She opened her eyes, looked up at him, and he saw that she tried to move her hand.

"I can ride," he heard her say, and her voice was unchanged—a little weak, but the timbre was there. "It wasn't my fault the field was rotten. We jumped all right, didn't we?"

"You went over like a bird," he said quietly; "it could not have been cleaner."

It was touching to him to see the color that in the human being answers each emotion struggling to rise to her white cheeks. It was just the faintest illumination. He knew his praise had lit it.

"Promise me that you won't let daddy know that I did it to convince—you?"

The spirit of a smile left her lips. She was as white as death, and as he saw that smooth young forehead contract, he understood that the pain was more mental than physical. Still her eyes were on him, anxious, beautiful, and Tremaine smiled at her.

The girl had been wondering for weeks just what that smile from John Tremaine would be. She had pictured it countless times and saw it now. As she knew, she closed her eyes and fainted away.

John felt the doctor put him aside gently and take his place by Isobel. Mrs. Tremaine bent over the girl, and John, after waiting a moment by the door, went out of the room alone.

He was deeply stirred. He stood for a few moments in the hallway at the door. In those few moments the little girl had become to him that infinitely precious

thing that one woman is to a man, and at that moment he thought to himself that he had never loved any one else in his life.

As everything came to him like a storm, so this belief came to him now, and as it came, he said :

“ Why, from the first moment that I saw her at those barriers, which she so authoritatively told me to take down for her, I have loved her.”

He said to himself that he had been acknowledging this for months, against every voice of common sense. On the last steps of the stairs, the bare old hall fronting him, there came over him the realization that his love for Isobel Malvern was hopeless—that he could never ask her to be his wife.

Malvern stood at the foot of the stairs, his hands on the newel post. His features worked, and his right hand was partly raised, as if the gesture, fully expressed, would be an imprecation. Tremaine understood only too well that Malvern wished him to leave the house and never to cross its door-step again.

John passed him quietly and took his hat from the stand. He drew a pair of gloves from his pocket, and fixing his compelling eyes on Malvern, said :

“ The doctor from Richmond will be here in a few hours. If Miss Malvern does not improve, you will send to New York for a specialist, of course ? ”

Malvern had come over to the front door, where John was standing, the knob in his hand. Malvern's anger and emotion had almost completely unnerved him. The assurance and calm of this man he despised,

his air of mastery, his very presence in the house, were too much for Malvern's control.

"By God!" he began, then asked in spite of himself:

"Why did my daughter send for you?"

"Miss Malvern," said Tremaine, "was very generous—as generous as she is brave."

Malvern lifted his hand to his mouth. He did not know that it could be possible to feel such dislike to any man. He breathed, nodding his gray head to John, and the word under his breath was almost indistinct:

"Coward!"

"And thief," John finished calmly. "That's what you want to say, isn't it? You are an older man than I, sir; you are in your own house."

The two men stood a moment without speaking. Then an expression of kindliness—almost benevolence—came over John Tremaine's face and he said:

"I have been in the wrong, Mr. Malvern, and, as I said to you at Riverside, I owe you a great deal. Good night."

He bowed, opened the door, shut it behind him, and went quickly down the steps up which he had carried Isobel, got on his horse, and rode away.

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. TREMAINE remained at Malvern, and for three days John saw no one but his servants and Mammy Chloe. His reputation as a successful farmer and as a brilliant business man had gone up and down the river. Everywhere he went, he met deference and respect. But these autumn evenings, alone in the homestead, as he looked out on the soft color of the landscape, he realized more than ever how alone he was in the world and how he needed the woman.

On returning to the house, the fourth day after Isobel's accident, he found Leavitt waiting for him in the library.

"Well," said the lawyer, taking John by the hand, "Chloe has been giving me a vivid description of Isobel's accident."

Tremaine answered coldly :

"It wasn't serious ; only a few bruises—no bones broken," and he urged Leavitt to remain with him for luncheon.

Leavitt said reproachfully :

"I reckon Malvern found it serious enough. His life is bound up in Isobel. Her mother . . ."

John dismissed the subject with these words :

"You must either let your daughters be sportswomen and take the consequences, or you must keep them off horses altogether."

"I see your mother has found it necessary to remain at Malvern."

John smiled. "Her absence from home doesn't make the accident serious. How everything turns round a woman, after all!"

He pulled out a chair for Leavitt at the table and sat down opposite him.

"I miss my mother." And with a smile he looked up, nodding, and said: "I think you miss her, too."

Leavitt changed his subject by asking: "Isobel will not be crippled or disfigured?"

"Good heavens, no!" Tremaine cried, with unnecessary reassurance. "A darkey's delight in describing an accident is artistic; don't listen to Mammy's picturesque yarns. Miss Malvern will be on a horse in two weeks."

Leavitt wondered to himself: "Is there a tender streak in John anywhere?"

Tremaine said to Chloe, who stood with her hands on her hips, her bright old face beaming on her boy:

"What do you mean by frightening Mr. Leavitt, Mammy?"

"Deed, ah didn' go fer to frighten him, Marse John. Ah'se bin turrible frighten' maself, an' so has yo'." Tremaine colored slightly.

"Nonsense, Mammy."

"When ah done see yo' mournin' here by the fire, Marse John, an' walkin' to an' fro like a ghost, a-brows-in' roun' like a skelepun, I sho' done reckon Missy Isobel was gwine to die."

An expression of wonder appeared on Leavitt's face but he said :

"Is there nothing that really touches you?"

"Yes," said John coolly, "the devotion of my Italian workmen."

Leavitt shrugged and regarded him calmly.

"There will be Italian citizens to vote for you at your election to Congress, John."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, your Italians will naturalize themselves and vote for Tremaine of Virginia at the next election."

"What do you mean?"

"This." The older man leaned forward and looked at John calmly through his glasses. "You may go to Congress if you like, at the next election."

Tremaine drank a glass of claret and wiped his lips deliberately.

"I am astonished to hear you say these things to me," he said, and then, interrupting himself, he continued: "I am curious to know what you said when my name was mentioned?"

Leavitt addressed himself to his luncheon for a few moments without speaking, then answered:

"It is not astonishing that you should have been remarked in a section of the country where important men are lacking. Your family has usually been prominent in affairs of the South," he went on solemnly; "it is time for a Tremaine to revive the traditions. You are accomplishing remarkable work."

John interrupted him roughly:

"I think you are quite mad, Leavitt," and his voice was so hard that the lawyer started in surprise. "No man but a lunatic would present himself for election with a past like mine. Even a man's foibles come out at election times, and as for his crimes"—he used the word clearly—"why, they break out like bad blotches, like evil diseases, and every ugly stain we hope to hide appears like a spot on a badly cleaned garment."

"How unfeelingly he speaks of it," the lawyer thought, but interrupted: "Your mother, Malvern, and myself are the only ones who know your history."

John pushed back his plate and lit a cigarette.

"My brother married. He doubtless told his wife. Once you've told a woman, go out in the street, and you will hear it cried from the housetops." After a second, apparently with more control, he asked in an ordinary tone of voice: "Do you think I should be justified in accepting the nomination?"

Leavitt flushed. "You are a Tremaine, and a little of the Tremaine leavens the whole lump."

"Then you believe me regenerated, Leavitt?"

"Yes," answered the lawyer eagerly. "I do."

Tremaine laughed aloud, rose from the table, and took a few steps to and fro; then, coming to the lawyer, he laid his hand on his shoulder.

"You are entirely mistaken, my dear friend." Over his dark face there came a sarcastic humor which the lawyer could not appreciate. "As far as character and morals are concerned, the boy who ran away from Redlands sixteen years ago would blush for me."

Leavitt drew back a little. Tremaine patted his shoulder lightly.

"My dear man, I'm a scarred old sinner beside that hot-hearted boy," and as though he looked back and saw the youthful John flying from home, the present Tremaine said in a low voice: "Poor young devil! Poor sentimental young fool!" He left Leavitt and went and stood with his back to the empty hearth.

Then Leavitt took a cigar and lighted it with deliberation while Tremaine found a fresh cigarette. After a moment's silence, Tremaine said:

"Knowing what the arena of public life is, and how old scandals are stirred, why do you suggest my presenting myself for Congress?"

"I wished you to know the situation."

"You wanted me to accept."

"I wanted to see what your reply would be."

Tremaine smoked a moment and then said:

"Well, I won't disappoint you. I refuse."

Without displaying whether he felt satisfied or not, Leavitt nodded:

"I reckon you're right, John; I reckon it's the wisest course."

Tremaine again laughed without humor, crossed his arms and threw his head up.

"God!" he exclaimed in a low voice, "what a wretched little circle we turn round in!" Then, as though he took Leavitt into an intimate confidence, he said: "I want this nomination more than I have wanted anything in my life. Do you hear me, Leavitt? What

you say is a temptation to me. You tell me no one knows my past. Why should I not take my chance?"

Leavitt was not surprised in the least at the change of Tremaine's mind. He said :

"Because if it should so happen that they raked up the past, I think it would kill your mother."

Tremaine smoked. His expressive face darkened. After a few moments he said somberly :

"For fifteen years she left me to wander as I would, without even trying to discover my whereabouts. I was an outcast," pursued Tremaine, "whom no one tried to win back or to regenerate." He smiled, but less darkly. "All my mother asked of me was that I should keep my dishonor from her door."

With the gentleness characteristic of him, Leavitt murmured :

"You've already begun to plant these graves over with flowers. Forget that morbid past."

John shrugged impatiently, and after a pause exclaimed :

"Then don't blame me if I do try to forget it! I am alive and vigorous, and I intend to live. Do you hear me? I am going to fight this scandal out right here and in my own way; do you understand? I am going to triumph over it, as I've triumphed over the land. I intend to run for Congress."

As he announced this decision, his face cleared. He puffed his cigarette hard and continued :

"Now let them rake up all the filth they will. I'll stand by what they find out against me outside of Virginia."

Leavitt put the fingers of his hands together, made a little cage, and as though he imprisoned his thoughts in it, looked through it pensively. If he considered that Tremaine once was a weak young man, he was a strong enough man now.

"John," he said slowly, "I will say to the committee whatever you wish. You are—as you say—fit. In a measure, your existence is your own, but it is linked with others—unfortunately, perhaps."

Tremaine murmured: "By God, unfortunately it is!"

The lawyer said sternly:

"Don't blaspheme; and why should innocent creatures be called upon to suffer again at this late day because of your weakness in the past?"

It was with a certain solemnity that John Tremaine turned to him.

"It's sometimes impossible to avoid suffering for another's sake," he said. "Let others bear it as I did."

Leavitt frowned. "You are savage," he said. "Your life, led in countries of which we here know nothing, your homeless existence, have rendered you indifferent to those ties which should make you tender to all the world. There is nothing so selfish as a man who has had no home and who admits no ties. He makes himself a unit when he should be part of the lives of many."

Tremaine looked at him calmly—looked at him and loved him. Leavitt, however, continued severe, looking at John with his shrewd old eyes. Returning

Leavitt's keen scrutiny, with a look in which there was a kind of benevolence, Tremaine said :

"You're very interesting, my dear friend ; but I know a lonely man who needs the ties you speak of more than I do, and he is one of the sweetest souls in the world."

Leavitt was not sufficiently naive to be unconscious that John meant himself.

"Never mind him," he said hurriedly. "You can't live to yourself alone here in Virginia. You've come right into the old home, John ; you've come right up to the fireside." Leavitt's voice shook : "You've come and sat right down by her side."

Mrs. Tremaine's son threw his cigarette into the fireplace, leaned on the mantel-shelf and listened. He saw the devotion in Leavitt's heart to the one woman, and the fact that his love would sacrifice everything to bring a moment's peace to this one woman touched him profoundly. He asked shortly :

"Do you mean to say that my future is to be utterly damned because of my reputation with three people in this God-forsaken little hole in the country ? Especially since they had the grace to bury the past and heap forgetfulness over it ?"

Leaning toward Tremaine, the older man said impressively, almost hesitatingly :

"John, I've watched you daily. You've performed a miracle. Your character seems to have been remade, if I might say so. But don't you know what such a thing as theft means in the honorable life of a man ?"

Turning abruptly from him, Tremaine walked over to the window, threw it wide open, and leaned out. After a few seconds, he turned back to the room and from where he stood said to Leavitt, in a suffocated tone:

"How narrow a lawyer is, after all! What little visions of life a man gets who lives forever in one place! My dear man, take a long walk and get away from Redlands. Study human nature a little, Leavitt." He laughed shortly. "Don't you know anything of human character, sir?"

But during the period of John's leaving him and going to the window, Leavitt had forgotten John's problems in contemplation of the suffering which he believed the mother had endured because of her youngest son. He could not admit the thought that this woman he worshipped was to be made once again to suffer for John's old crime. As though he had not heard what Tremaine said, Leavitt exclaimed:

"In those days, John—forgive me for saying it—but I thanked God it was you who took the money and not David."

John came quickly back, thrusting his hands in his pockets and biting his lip as he repeated, emphasizing every word:

"You thanked God that David had not stolen the money?"

"Yes," nodded the lawyer, wiping his glasses. "I've often done so. Your mother's heart is one that is made to worship and her love is blind and absorbing. She

worshipped David, and if he had done what you did, it would have killed her."

The man before him drew a long breath. "You are telling me nothing new."

"Now she loves his young sons in the same way, John, and their future is precious to her." Then, appealingly, as though he called upon John to stand by the whole family, to support the family decayed and dependent on him, Leavitt said: "My dear boy, you would not be willing to rake up a past and uncover the stain to satisfy your own ambition. You would not make your mother weep afresh; you would not run the risk of blighting David's sons, John."

In a colorless voice, Tremaine repeated after him:

"Blighting David's sons."

Leavitt rose and put his head on Tremaine's arm. He said affectionately:

"It's your cross. God knows, I believe it's a hard one. The time perhaps will come when you'll feel that this sacrifice has been worth while, . . . make it. Be glad you've got some one to make it for. By heaven!" said the lawyer, throwing up his head and putting his hand to it, "I'd give my life if there were any one to whom its sacrifice meant anything!"

John neither looked at him nor heard him. His head was bent; his face was dark and gloomy; the old shadow, the old sternness settled again upon his face.

"Marse John," said Chloe from the doorway, "some o' dem 'Talans is jabbering hyer, an' de Lawd knows

ah cain't undahstan' a wor' dey means. Dey sho' do talk de worst language ah ebber hyar."

She had come from washing the dishes and twisted her blue apron in her hand, beaming on her foster son. His face softened as he looked upon her. He put out his hand to Leavitt.

"If you'll excuse me, I'll go to my work."

CHAPTER XVII

JOHN had plenty of time during the days following Isobel's illness and convalescence to look into his heart. His mother's absence made the house inexpressibly lonely. He kept out of it for the most part, only coming home for his meals, and the evenings were long.

He never went to Riverside personally to ask news of the girl whom his rude taunt had driven almost to her death. His mother telephoned to him daily at a given time; no matter what his duties were, he arranged to be there to take the message.

Once in Richmond he ordered a large box of flowers to be sent to Isobel. They came to her without his card.

He had plenty of occupation for his mind and thoughts. The lands of the Blythe Mountain Coal Company had been proved to contain a thick seam of coal of the best quality. He pressed the extension of the works on a larger scale and thought to himself: "Everything I touch turns to gold." The image of Isobel, which persistently came to his mind, he tried to thrust away.

One day at Riverside he opened a telegram to his mother from Julia Tremaine. It read:

"Shall come with the boys to spend Christmas at Riverside. If you cannot have us, let me know."

This visit, unsolicited, would be a break in his life. He could prevent it, but he did not wish to do so. He wanted to see David's sons, and he had a feeling of curiosity about Julia.

At the end of a fortnight, his mother came back to Riverside, and when he saw her busied about her familiar duties, he realized how much he had missed her, how charming the presence of a woman was in the house, and how lonely he had been.

Mrs. Tremaine flushed when he bent and kissed her forehead, but she did not return his caress. He wondered what the workings of her mind had been during the days when she had been sick-nurse—what she knew of the cause of the accident.

When he had seen Isobel in bed after the accident, she had spoken in so low a voice that no one but himself had heard her injunction that he should not let her father know.

"Miss Malvern is quite herself again?"

"Quite. She thinks of nothing but to be on horseback again as soon as possible."

"I understand that."

"You do? If I were her father, I should forbid her ever to ride again."

"You would make a coward of her."

"Mr. Malvern has been obliged to consent to her learning to ride cross-country."

"Plucky little girl!"

The exclamation was not out of his mouth before he regretted it, but Mrs. Tremaine ignored it. She was

putting little touches to the room, disarranged in her absence.

"Her father is going to take her to Hot Springs for six weeks."

John felt at once a great disappointment and a great relief. This would enormously simplify matters. Six weeks would bring them almost to Christmas time, when the Northern Tremaines should arrive.

From his mother's attitude and the fact that she said nothing, he believed that Malvern had not pained her by telling her that John was the cause of Isobel's accident.

Mrs. Tremaine touched a letter which lay on the table at her hand, and which John had not observed.

"I brought this," she said succinctly, and although she did not leave the room, she went over to the window and sat there with her sewing. In picking up the envelope with its address in a strange handwriting, John experienced what every man in love feels when he first sees his name written by the woman's hand. It was frank, it was simple, it might have been a boy's writing, it was so round and clear. He opened the letter.

It had no address.

"A box of wonderful flowers came to me from Richmond the other day. There was no card with them. I have no right to suppose that they were from you; yet, I can't help thinking that you sent them.

"Many people have sent me flowers from Richmond. I have even had some from New York. But these I

liked the best of all. If you ask your mother, she will tell you the last of them have only just faded.

"If you didn't send them to me, please don't tell me so. I would rather not know.

"Tim tells me that Wildcat is dead. I couldn't ask until to-day, because I feared to ask. Poor beautiful creature, I am so awfully sorry! It doesn't seem right, does it? that a girl's recklessness and a man's rudeness should be the cause of an innocent creature's death. Aren't you awfully sorry? Won't you ride over and tell me so? I am quite well enough to see you.

"Sincerely,

"ISOBEL MALVERN."

Tremaine read the letter, folded it up, and put it in his pocket. There was no reason in her eyes why he should not come. Even the most casual neighbor would have been polite enough to call several times to inquire.

By one rudeness after another, by continued churlish impoliteness, he would doubtless arrive at the point of making her understand.

Making her understand what? Making a charming woman understand that you think she is in love with you; that you on your part are indifferent, and intend taking the most uncivilized means to disenchant her?

As these reflections passed through his mind, he said quietly to himself, touching the letter against his breast:

"And I love her."

Leavitt came into the room. John saw him go over to Mrs. Tremaine where she sat, lift her hand, and kiss it.

"Back, Molly? It has been a long while," he said in an undertone, and John saw them look at each other.

Unlike himself, Leavitt had no reason to keep from Malvern House, and he had been a faithful visitor.

"We have been mighty lonely, John and I," said the lawyer. "Riverside was like an oyster-shell with the pearl gone, wasn't it, John?"

John watched them.

The peculiar delicacy of his mother's skin made all her emotions evident by the gentle rising of the color to her cheeks. She blushed when her admirer touched her hand, she smiled on him more kindly than John had ever seen her smile. The romance of it touched him.

CHAPTER XVIII

HE saw Isobel Malvern once before she went away. Coming suddenly into Leavitt's office, toward the end of the week, he found himself in the room with her, for she sat before Leavitt's desk in his revolving chair. She had ridden over.

To Isobel the shock was great. When the cruel red that stained her cheeks had died, and she grew quite pale, John saw, on her forehead just above her cheek, a bright little scar. He also saw that they had cut off her beautiful hair, which was short like a boy's under her riding-hat.

Without the formality of any greeting, he asked quickly :

"Are you riding again so soon?"

Isobel's whip was on the table. Her russet boots showed beneath her short brown skirt.

"Why, of course. It was the only thing to do; otherwise I might have been afraid forever. Don't you think I was right?"

He had never seen anything so frank as her blue eyes, nor had he ever seen anything so enticing as the smile on her red lips.

Her feelings were clear as crystal. She was unaccustomed to concealment. She had a fine scorn of any ruse, and in this first love she could not conceal the tumult of feelings that Tremaine had roused in her.

He did not refer to her accident.

"I came to see Leavitt on a matter of business, but my business can wait for yours. It must be very serious to bring you to a lawyer's office."

Seeing on the man's face no softening, failing to meet the response she longed to see, the girl said to herself, with a sinking of her heart :

"Oh, he is harsher, colder than ever ! It means nothing to him to see me. In a moment Mr. Leavitt will come in. To-morrow we shall be gone from Riverside. Why did he look at me as he did when I was hurt ?"

Aloud she said : "I understand that you are the busiest man in Virginia. I suppose you are making your election campaign."

"I shall not accept the nomination," he answered shortly, and she exclaimed with interest :

"Not accept the nomination ! But you're not serious."

"Quite. I am not a politician ; I'm a farmer and a mine-superintendent."

She went on more naturally, the impersonal conversation helping her to gather herself together.

"Nonsense !" she laughed. "You don't suggest a farmer, or a miner either, for that matter."

She smiled, leaned forward to him.

"Do you know, I really don't believe that you are anything you say you are."

In her half laughing words, there was something that caught Tremaine's ear. He looked at her sharply and asked :

"What do you mean?"

"Why," returned Isobel Malvern, "I mean that you always seem to me—I don't quite know how to put it—not exactly acting a part—you are too real for that—but keeping back something." She hesitated:

"You see, when I met you first, you were dressed like a field hand, and you weren't that!"

He laughed harshly.

"I am just what you see."

"No," she said thoughtfully, "no; what shall I say?"

"Say it," he commanded.

"It's vague. I can't express it; it's just a feeling."

John had seated himself on the table near her and picked up her riding-whip. He was in love with her and could not tell her so. Every word she said interested him deeply. She was now showing him something of the working of her mind.

"When you saw me first," he said grudgingly, as though he were forcing himself to talk with her against his will, "I was a field hand, and I deceived you."

Isobel smiled. "And the second time, too, you were a field hand."

"And I deceived you."

"And the third time you were a field hand."

"And you only found me out because I carried a fine piece of linen for a handkerchief."

"No," she said slowly, "that's not quite so."

"But you didn't guess?"

Once again his eyes were on her with a cruel intent-

ness for a man who did not love her. He saw the blood beating in her cheeks.

Tremaine understood women and knew his power here, and that he had only to put out his hand, so idly playing with her whip, to take hers. He believed that he might encircle her lovely chin and lift her lips to his. He knew, too, that she was struggling not to say to him all she wished. The domination in him—aside from his love—tempted him, but he was also hungry to hear her speak.

"No," she said slowly, in a low voice, "I did not see that you were John Tremaine."

She stopped.

"Well," he urged, "well then, I did deceive!"

"But I saw," she went on, "something perhaps even you would think rather subtle in me to see."

"How do you mean?"

"I saw that if you were a field laborer, you were quite different to any field laborer I ever heard of. I felt it the first time and more strongly the second."

Was the rôle that he was playing actually forcing this young girl out of her rôle? Was she making love to him? It had its charm. She drew off her heavy white riding-gloves, setting free her delicate hands. They were fine, but strong and capable, well modeled. He had seen jewels in Africa, from his own mines, that he would like to put upon her fingers. There were no rings, but she would wear them well.

"And between the second time and the third time,"

he pursued, "you did me the honor to analyze my personality."

His tone might have hurt her, but she was not going to allow herself to be hurt by him. It would take a great deal of cruelty to obliterate from her mind John's face as he had bent toward her when she was injured, and the memory of his look.

"Yes," she said frankly, "I thought about you, if you call it analysis. If you had been a field hand, I shouldn't have thought about you, and so you see, after all"—her voice was peculiarly sweet—"I really, in a way, knew you, didn't I?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tremaine. "It is rather subtle, isn't it?"

She sat back, composed herself. Their interview was being prolonged beyond her wildest hope.

"Not really subtle," said Isobel. "It's quite simple and brings me to what I said a few moments ago: that I think perhaps I really know you better than you think."

He knew that the situation was dangerous. If he did not break the spell he would be unable to restrain himself from telling her then and there that he loved her. He said practically:

"You mean to say then that you think I am a born politician and not a farmer or a miner?"

He laughed, put down the riding-whip, and thrust his hands in his pockets. His tone, the unmoved expression of his face, hurt her.

"You have great powers," she said quietly, "and I

am sure that you could go as high as you like. Virginia needs just such a man as you to represent her." She continued: "There have been big Tremaines in history. It seems rather a shame you should give to Africa and to England what you are not willing to give to us."

She did not dream how she goaded him. It was hard enough to be obliged from a sense of honor to relinquish all he was relinquishing, without the knowledge that in so doing he disappointed her.

He laughed.

"My brother, Judge Tremaine," he said, "carried the Tremaine banner very high. He remained in his own country and made the name famous in New York State."

Isobel laughed.

He was surprised and asked:

"What makes you take it in that way?"

"Oh," she said, "the idea of Judge Tremaine carrying a banner. But I forget that you had not seen your brother for fifteen years."

"Did you know him?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well," said Tremaine, "he does not seem to have charmed you as he did most people."

"Since you did not know him," said Isobel, "and he really was nothing to you, judging by what Mammy says, you won't mind my saying that I did not admire him."

She was looking at him as she spoke and a smile touched his face.

"Really!" he laughed, scarcely knowing what he said, "you knew him well enough to feel that, did you?"

They both laughed. From the office next came the little tinkle of Leavitt's bell. He had been there all the time and had purposely left them alone. Isobel rose.

"I am going," she said; "instead of talking to Mr. Leavitt, I've talked to you, and I must be riding home."

She extended her hand; John took it.

"You see, it's my first ride, and I am not so very fit yet."

Looking him full in the eyes with her frank, fine glance, she asked:

"Won't you take the nomination?"

He was not all iron and if, as she said, he wore a mask, she had lifted it. He took her hand, as though he were about to touch it with his lips, but did not do so.

"Thank you for caring," he said simply: "I mean, for caring about Virginia. You told me how you love the State, didn't you? that day we walked along the river, and you knew me by my handkerchief."

She said, in a tone so low that he could hardly hear it:

"Not by your handkerchief; by your eyes."

"You still wear the locket? Well, you must love Virginia enough to want the best men to represent her."

"I do; that's why I want you to go to Congress."

He let her hand fall. She saw his face darken. He took her riding-whip, gave it to her, handed her her gloves and walked over to the door, which he opened.

"I am not worth thinking about," he said, almost roughly, "and I am not the man to represent Virginia. Ask your father; he will tell you so. Ride home quietly, and when you get back, rest, and be careful when you take fences that there are no rabbit holes on the other side." Then he broke off abruptly, and this time she did not mind the roughness in his voice, for he had given her what every woman loves to receive from one man in particular—a command.

CHAPTER XIX

JOHN finally persuaded his mother to take part in the worldly life of Richmond, and one evening he took her to a dinner at the home of Silas Brandegee, president then of the Coal Company.

Brandegee knew nothing of the coldness existing between the Malverns and the Tremaines and sent Mrs. Tremaine in on her neighbor's arm while John took in his hostess. Isobel sat opposite him. The out-of-door life at the hot springs of Virginia had completely restored her health. But what use to wear one's most becoming dress and to look lovely, if the one man in the world never looks at you? Mrs. Brandegee was young and charming, and John devoted himself to her.

It was not the custom at the Brandegees' to separate after dinner, and the men and women gathered together in the great hall. Brandegee stood before the fire, his hands under the tail of his coat, and harangued Tremaine.

"Why don't you run for Congress, Tremaine?" he asked directly and followed: "I am beginning to think that you are a quitter—a shaker of responsibilities. You refuse to take a hand in anything that means a personal effort on your part. It's not fair. You have come back after an absence of fifteen years and in an incredibly short time you have made every one talk

of you. Now I have lived here all my life and no one has even asked me to run for mayor."

"Because of your rigid aversion to politics."

"How do you know that?" asked Brandegee quickly.

"Every one knows the reputation and opinions of the biggest man south of Washington."

Brandegee smiled, pleased.

"If half of what you say is true, my opinion will have weight with you. You must run for Congress."

Mrs. Tremaine, who was sitting by Isobel on the divan, leaned forward, looking at her son. John replied curtly :

"In this case your opinion will not affect me."

His tone was so short that Brandegee shrugged. Tremaine was living up to his reputation for rudeness. Brandegee, however, continued courteously :

"I can only present the view of a Virginian who represents in a measure his community. We need you. I loved your father. There was no one like him in the district. I want to see Virginia make her mark in Congress. You are the man for us."

Mrs. Tremaine's cheeks grew hot ; her eyes fell.

"What makes you think I am the man, Brandegee?"

Emphasizing with his eye-glasses as he spoke, Brandegee announced methodically :

"You have won the confidence of every one in the county ; you are a rich man ; you have a stainless reputation ; you are your father's son, your mother's son—why, it doesn't seem to need explanation."

John Tremaine's eyes met his mother's and held hers

prisoner. He seemed to say to her: "Now you see the opinion of me that others hold. What do you think about me now?" He knew that she was suffering, but he did not know that she was suffering more for him than for herself. Then, very quietly, he turned his gaze to his neighbor Malvern, who, seated in a comfortable leather chair with his legs crossed, was smoking, his face hard and set, looking into the fire. Malvern was especially regretting that his daughter was present to hear these eulogies of John Tremaine.

"Don't you take an interest in politics?" Mrs. Brandegee asked sweetly. And John replied:

"An enormous interest. I believe it the one field for a disinterested American who can forego personal gain and overcome his prejudices."

Brandegee exclaimed delightedly:

"Well, now we are beginning to understand each other! My dear fellow, we are quite of the same mind. I am willing to pledge a good sum of money for the campaign."

Mrs. Tremaine moved where she sat. To her the word "money" meant only one thing: the theft John committed when a boy. She heard John say:

"I could handle my campaign without much expenditure, but I shall not accept the nomination."

Brandegee turned to Mrs. Tremaine.

"Come, my dear friend," he urged, "you must persuade John. Don't you want to see a Tremaine in the House?"

Mrs. Tremaine was not a Virginian for nothing.

Though her face was quite colorless, she controlled her emotion. She saw in this moment what her younger son might become, if he had not committed that crime, and she understood all that was debarred from him now. It was a cruel moment for the proud woman. Before she could speak, Brandegee continued:

"We are not old Romans. Tell your son that he must not tie himself down to a farm. We come to him as the voice of the people. We need him. Speak to him, Mrs. Tremaine."

An expression of pity and at the same time of serenity crossed John's face. From his chair, behind his cigar smoke, Malvern spoke. His voice was rasping:

"Come, Brandegee," he said, a little irritated; "why should you seek to turn a man from his chosen career? If Tremaine chooses farming and mining as his business, why urge him into politics?"

John's eyes did not turn themselves in the direction of his neighbor. He was looking at his mother.

"I urge Tremaine," said Mr. Brandegee, "because, though I am not active politically, I am not devoid of public spirit and I want to see this State represented. It is no new thing to find a man lost in his own State. Now Tremaine has been a big man in Africa; he must be a big man here."

Brandegee was now conscious that Mrs. Tremaine had not spoken. He bowed to her politely and said:

"Give me your aid, my dear lady. Tell John what is his duty to do."

Even the attitude of her quiet son seemed to say to her that he was waiting. As she spoke only Isobel, who sat beside her, heard the tremor in her voice.

"I think John is quite right," she said. "He has his mines and the property. They are very absorbing."

It was a weak reply. Even Brandegee felt it. Leavitt, whose sole preoccupation during the conversation had been for Mrs. Tremaine, now broke in gently :

"I reckon you will have to take the nomination yourself, Brandegee, and if you decide to accept it, that will absorb you."

Brandegee threw out his hands with a gesture of despair.

"It is a great loss," he said ; "a very decided mistake."

"You see," said Tremaine calmly, "I am returning to South Africa soon. I am not even planning to cast my fortunes with Virginia."

Brandegee broke into protestations, came up, and put his hand on John's arm, and then Malvern looked at his daughter. As he feared would be the case, her eyes were fastened on John Tremaine. He had thought, when he brought her to Richmond that night, that she was looking wonderfully well and gay. So indeed she had been, with the prospect before her of seeing John again after six weeks. Now she was as lifeless and as pale as a candle from which the flame has been struck. She sat in the corner of the sofa, her hands clasped in her lap, and after a second looked at them medita-

tively, with an expression too absorbed for a young girl. Her attitude and expression exasperated her father and intensified his dislike of the man who stood before the fireplace with his host. The other man had joined the group. Some one began to ask him about the Reekie diamond mines, and Malvern, once president of the biggest bank in the district outside of Richmond, once a man of affairs and importance, now poor and involved, sat apart while his clerk with a dishonorable record behind him monopolized the principal people of the town. If Brandegge knew what he knew, if the other men knew, if his daughter knew—that John Tremaine was a thief! He crossed the room to where Mrs. Tremaine and Isobel were sitting, and when he suggested their leaving because she looked tired, she went with him without demur.

The following day in the living-room Mrs. Tremaine came up to him and touched his arm. He had been silent and moody and now stood before the fireplace staring at the hearth-rug.

“Lift up your eyes, John.”

He said with an effort:

“My eyes are always on the ground. It has made my fortune and it is my life.”

“You would like to go to Congress, would you not? I know you would have won the election.”

“Yes, I should have liked it.”

She daily grew more maternal to him. Now she longed to comfort him, but with the tenderest senti-

ment she could not help feeling that it was all his own fault. To her surprise he lifted his head and said abruptly, as though the question was forced out of him :

“ You really think that it is impossible ? ”

It was hard for her to blight him with the answer she felt in duty bound to make. She murmured :

“ Of course, as Mr. Brandegee talked, it all seemed so simple ; nothing might be said. Mr. Malvern will never break his word. It may now be only a question of conscience, and yet at any moment . . . these things are never really buried. . . . ”

Her face was so troubled that John forgot himself and said mercifully :

“ Don't think about it any more. It is of no importance. I made my decision long ago, and when one once makes a decision, the rest is comparatively easy. After all, the only difficulty is to reach a decision.”

As he said these words, the dark shadow lifted from his face and with what in him was extreme gentleness, he lifted her hand and held it between his.

“ Of course, you are quite right. A man with a crime on his record must give up distinctions and honors. Taking everything into consideration, I am very fortunate.” And he surprised her by reverting to the past. “ If you could hear them in Reekie, mother, you would see what they thought about me there.” He laughed. “ Do you know, I think that a chap would fare very hardly in Reekie who tried to throw mud at me.” He shrugged. “ What does any-

thing matter, really?" he said, "except what you've got here." He touched his breast. "If that is empty, why, the rest is nothing at all."

Mrs. Tremaine's lips trembled. For a moment she covered her eyes with her hand.

"It is cruelly hard," she murmured, "cruelly hard," then faced him again.

The look on his face now was so bright, so illuminated, that his mother was almost dazzled by its sweetness.

"There are harder things," he said slowly. "Believe me, the chief annoyance is that it makes you suffer. Now you must not let it," he said commandingly. "Put it aside. Take it altogether, don't you think things have turned out pretty well for the sinner?" He was smiling. "Remember, it's very long ago, and all those years you had David to comfort you."

Voluntarily John had not before spoken his brother's name. He had seen the emotion the slightest reference to him caused her.

"It would have been harder for you," he said measuredly, "if it had been David."

She drew back from him, smothered a cry, and he heard her say: "Oh."

He nodded. "So you see it might have been worse. Now go to bed, mother, and forget about everything excepting the fact that there are strawberries growing in the greenhouses, and that you can make strawberry shortcake for us when we return to Riverside. And

don't cry," he added, dropping her hand. "The loss of a seat in Congress is not worth one tear."

Mrs. Tremaine took the renunciation less peacefully than did her son.

From the moment that John brushed away the idea of political success, he absorbed himself more deeply in his work at the mine. He had difficulties there. Constant troubles arose between the Italians, the Hungarians, and the negroes; but he ruled them with a rod of iron, and was at once feared and respected.

One day his mother asked him, with perceptible hesitation, if it would cost him too much pain if she spoke to him about his brother's affairs.

"On the contrary, it would interest me very much indeed."

She had confided to Leavitt that Julia had written her a very troubling letter. David, in the latter years of his life, had been unfortunate in his investments, and now that the estate was settled up, Julia and her children found their affairs very much involved. Mrs. Tremaine had been brooding on these things, not daring to approach John.

This evening, as they sat together in the glow of the cedar-wood fire, she spoke, and he said shortly:

"I saw there was something on your mind. Tell me about it."

The power of his voice, the ring of command in it, struck her, and she thought then that it would be difficult to disobey him. She fortified herself with the

knowledge that John owed everything to his elder brother, but it was a delicate situation. She said :

"It is hard to talk to you."

"Why?"

"Because I know you less than I know any one in the world, John, even though you are my son."

"You are wrong there," he returned. "If you would let yourself believe that I am just as I am—as you see me—you would find that you knew me well enough to speak about David's estate. I suppose there is not much left of it."

She asked, astonished :

"Why should you think that?"

"Because," he said, rather bitterly, "there is nothing in the world that could worry you now, excepting something in connection with David."

Mrs. Tremaine outlined to him the state of affairs briefly, and with his hands linked between his knees, leaning over and staring into the fire, he listened to the story of his brother's financial affairs and remembered how Julia had jilted him for his brother. When she had finished, he said coldly :

"Let Julia ask me to help her."

His mother exclaimed :

"Oh, how can you suggest such humiliation!"

And he blurted out, turning to Mrs. Tremaine a face not crimsoned by the firelight alone :

"Why, in God's name, should I not?"

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the pained expression of her face brought him to himself.

He waited a moment before speaking, and then said lightly :

“Don’t look so distressed, mother. I am sorry that I have annoyed you. Tell Julia to come down here with the boys. I will help her. Send her a wire to-day.”

CHAPTER XX

THE friendship between Leavitt and John Tremaine had deepened. Leavitt had a faculty of seeing in other people the qualities he himself possessed. The gentle Southerner peopled the world with admirable human beings. It was impossible for him not to respond to John's charm, and, besides, John was the son of the woman whom Leavitt adored.

Ever since his return from Africa, John, as it seemed to Leavitt, had contradicted every known rule and theory applicable to embezzlers, and men who had broken their mothers' hearts. Leavitt, who had no close friend, except Mrs. Tremaine, found himself becoming dependent on the mind and companionship of Tremaine.

Leavitt's house stood not far from the bank of the river. Age had mellowed the wood in which Federal bullets had left historic scars. From the windows of his library he could look out upon the river, and across through the oaks he could see the roofs of Riverside. His little homestead was ideal to him. It was a sort of observatory from which he watched a star. There was to the man who had loved hopelessly all his life a great consolation in being so near to the woman herself. Separated from her by the red banks and the river, a few acres of field and lawn, he had nevertheless

felt that they lived their lives together. From his windows he watched the changing seasons. The live oaks, whose leaves never withered and fell, became to him a symbol of his faithful devotion, unchanged through the seasons.

He was sitting with a book before the log fire in his little study, toward five o'clock in the afternoon, when his black servant announced :

"Mistah John, Marse Sam."

Leavitt sprang up, pushed his chair—the most comfortable one in the room—toward the fire, wrung John's hand, forced him to take the chair, drew up a little table where Pompey always arranged the cigars his master loved, a few cigarettes, and a briarwood pipe with a silver band.

"John," he said, "I am perfectly delighted, my dear fellow. I was just about to walk over to Riverside myself."

Leavitt wore a colored waistcoat—rather a gay relic of his gayer days ; a black velvet smoking-jacket, a pair of gray trousers and a bright red cravat. Above his collar his keen, well-bred face was as fresh in color as a young man's. The features were clearly cut, the cheeks beardless, and his hair, slightly gray at the temples, was as abundant as in his youth. Tender-hearted, impulsive, made of the worst stuff in the world for business success, he was made of the best stuff in the world for sentiment and for friendship.

"Pompey," he said, "fetch something for Mr. John to drink. You know what he likes."

"Leavitt," said John, "I came at this time because my mother has an unexpected visitor. I left her with Malvern, who has not been at the house in many months. I want to talk to you on a very delicate matter, Leavitt." And Leavitt, who for several weeks had longed to talk to John on a very delicate matter, but had not dared to do so, wondered whether John's matter were the same. "You are Mr. Malvern's lawyer, aren't you?" John asked.

Leavitt bowed his head, and his face took the important expression that it assumed whenever he strayed into the world of business. In these days his excursions into that world were rare. He had almost no clients; if possible, fewer than ever. He continued to be a delightful failure. John, looking at him, smiled.

"You wouldn't let me make you rich, would you, Sam?"

"Money," said Leavitt, "is the poorest thing in the world, my dear fellow."

"So much so," said Tremaine, "that one should ignore it sufficiently to be willing to accept its advantages and the unmistakable power it gives. The very way in which certain proud poor people despise it and attach undue importance to it, gives it a reality that it loses entirely to a busy, useful, rich man."

Leavitt returned his smile.

"You are a useful, busy rich man, John," he said. "There's no doubt about that. Your worst enemy could not deny you that."

"You could be the same if you wished to be, Sam."

Leavitt shook his head.

"I have a groove," he said. "In a measure, it expresses me. I am too old to change. I should not look well out of my niche. But you spoke of Malvern."

"Yes," said Tremaine. "I came here to talk of him with you, Sam, as I can speak of him to no one else."

Leavitt gave him his most professional attention.

"He has been uncharitable to you, my dear fellow. He is one of those unflinching judges."

"I was not thinking about his personal relations with me," said Tremaine; "nor do I ever blame one man for his attitude toward another. Our attitude toward others is something for the most part beyond our control. It is a question of personal relationship—the most subtle, and one of the most powerful things in the world."

Leavitt listened to him. To this peaceful gentleman who had never traveled further than New York and who rarely had been even that far, John represented the world, and Leavitt had grown used to give him an attention which, because of its very interest, had a certain respect.

"I used to think," said John, "that it was impossible for one person to be drawn to another without a kindred response, though circumstances might prevent any exhibition or revelation of the dual attraction. I don't think that now." He looked at Leavitt. "I am attracted by certain things in Malvern; we could

have been great friends. I have referred before to his kindness to me when I was a young chap. I used to watch him in the bank, and I admired him profoundly. I admire him now. He bears his fallen fortunes like a thoroughbred. Now," he continued, flicking the ash from his cigar, "something must be done."

"How do you mean?" asked Leavitt.

"Something must be intelligently combined so that Malvern's finances may be put in shape."

Leavitt shook his head, smiling.

"I am afraid you cannot play the part of a magician in this case, John. If he had been a younger man—if it had not been for the question of your mother—Redmond might have insulted you when you made your first proposition regarding the coal company."

John continued, looking into the fire:

"He could not insult me, Sam. Nothing that he would say would offend me. I know his sense of honor and in his eyes I have offended against it irretrievably. He is in a position to make me feel my disgrace. He has his reasons; I don't blame him. In his place, I should feel exactly as he does. Now let us look at the business proposition."

Leavitt cleaned his eye-glasses on his silk handkerchief and looking penetratingly at his companion thought to himself: "John is doing this for the girl," and the question thus turning from business to sentiment interested him more than ever.

"I want you to help me to carry out a plan of buying some of his land. He must never know—he

need never know—indeed, it would be fatal should he suspect.”

Leavitt said, rather excitedly :

“He would not think twice of drawing a gun on both of us !”

Pompey came in with a tray of drinks, which he put down by John’s side.

“Fill your glass, John,” said the lawyer. Pompey filled one for his master, and then stood beaming on the two gentlemen.

“Taste good, Marse John ?” he asked anxiously.

“Perfect, Pompey.” And Pompey went away satisfied.

The two friends lifted their glasses and John said :

“Here’s to Redmond Malvern !”

They drank solemnly. When they had put down their glasses, John said :

“You know something of the lay of the Malvern property, Sam ?”

“Something,” said Leavitt. “There was a question of a sale five or six years ago, and I went over the original deeds with Redmond. Besides the home farm it includes a stretch of worthless swamp land—some five hundred acres of it, lying along the river, as you know. Then there’s a lot of mountain country—no good for any purpose.”

John said: “Now, this property you mention lies close to the Blythe Mountain coal district.” He smiled at Leavitt. “Would it surprise you very much, my dear fellow, if I told you that it was rich in coal ?”

Leavitt said peacefully, without excitement :

"It would surprise me very much, John ; and I think it would you !"

"Not so much as you think. There's a rumor in Richmond to that effect."

Leavitt smiled. "If there is," he said, "you've started it. I know for a certain fact that the whole district has been expertized since you found coal in Blythe Mountain."

John nodded. "There is, nevertheless, such a rumor, Sam—a rumor that will grow—a rumor that will obtain credence, that will not be denied. There will be a man here to-morrow from New York to see you, who will offer you about half a million dollars for the Malvern land I speak of, skirting the company's property ; and you will not be so big a fool as to allow your client to refuse it."

Leavitt's pipe had gone out. He was keenly watching his vis-à-vis. He knocked the ashes out upon the hearth, filled his pipe again methodically, with the attention of an affectionate smoker, and when he had lit it and puffed several times, he said emphatically :

"You'll have to count me out of your scheme."

"Why ?"

"Well," said Leavitt slowly, "I couldn't act up to it, my dear boy. I won't say I disapprove of it. If you are rich enough to juggle with men's fates, it's your own affair. But you mustn't expect me to aid you in this, John."

"I am disappointed," said Tremaine.

"Oh, no," said Leavitt gently, smoking, but smiling at him; "I never ran away from home, John. I never made a fortune and came back the big man of the place. I am an obscure, unsuccessful lawyer. There's nothing romantic about me!"

"You are one of the most romantic figures I ever knew," said John.

Leavitt shook his head. "Count me out. I couldn't play the part. I should spoil it."

John calmly remarked: "You can't help yourself—you are bound to help me in this—and Sam, you will give me your word of honor that our conversation remains a secret, and that no one—above all, my mother—knows of my connection with this affair."

"Oh, I promise that," said Leavitt.

John threw down the remains of his cigar in the fireplace, pushed the dark hair back from his forehead, and held out his hand to Leavitt.

"Good-night, my dear fellow," he said. "Unless you think it is not too late to come back with me to Riverside? Malvern will be gone by this time."

He dropped his friend's hand, and under the gaze of the old lawyer, his own eyes grew sober.

"John," said Leavitt slowly, and then hesitated. "John," he said, "you are mighty fond of the little girl, aren't you?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE house that Leavitt occupied had been owned in Revolutionary days by one of Washington's generals. Where the present master now sat musing of John Tremaine and his spiritual battles, other campaigns had been planned by Washington and his officers, and the old room still retained something of its eighteenth-century characteristics. The Colonial table was kept polished like a mirror by Pompey, who himself had been a body-servant in the war of the Rebellion and was distinguished amongst his race as being a "pow'ful clean niggah." On the polished floor were a few worn old rag-carpet rugs, made by Leavitt's mother herself. The walls were paneled, and the smoke of innumerable fires had darkened them—the old ceiling as well.

Leavitt had made no modern innovation in his house, for the very good reason that he could not have paid the bills. With the utmost economy, by wearing the shabbiest of clothes and by denying himself every pleasure, he managed to live, and Pompey looked after him like a mother.

He passed months of his existence in this old room, the one completely furnished apartment in the rather dilapidated, rambling house. On the chimney stood a pair of fine candlesticks, and Pompey now

lighted one by one their twinkling lights. They were reflected by the mirror behind them, and the rosy glow of the fire flickered upon its Colonial frame.

The early December twilight gathered without, and the negro drew in the faded red curtains.

"Gwine to gib yo' fine dinnah to-night, Marse Sam."

This announcement was vaguely heard by his master. There was nothing new in it. Pompey regularly tickled his master's appetite with the same words every night.

"Ham 'n' aigs, cohn-braide 'n' a shakin' custard, suh."

"Very good, Pompey." Leavitt did not remark that the menu had been unvaried for the past week.

Pompey withdrew, closing the white door behind the rep curtains, and left his master alone before the fire. Leavitt's musings were not very happy ones. To begin with, he felt himself cheated out of an hour of Mrs. Tremaine's society, and he always considered that those lost hours never could be made up. He sighed and thought of John, of the largeness of his nature and of his readiness to brush aside all obstacles and minor scruples when necessary to attain his ends. He wondered whether he would have blamed John's suggestion if it had come from a man whose record had been different, and he also wondered why he had not more emphatically challenged John's point of view.

"It is curious," he said to himself, "the effect the boy has upon me."

He called him "boy," seeing him in that moment as he remembered him years before.

"He calls forth a certain respect and admiration; the truth of the matter is that he blinds me by his charm. I am a weak old man. I should have severely pulled him up."

Some one had come in downstairs. Leavitt heard the bell ring and the front door shut, and in a few moments Pompey's step could be heard coming up the bare stairs cheerfully talking to a new visitor. He threw open the door of the library with much gesture and bowed his gray head low.

"Miss Is'bel, Mistah Lebbitt. Said she would walk right in, suh." And Pompey shut the door behind Isobel Malvern.

"My dear child," said the lawyer, enormously surprised at her appearance. "This is an honor, a great honor. Let me take your muff and tippet, and sit here by the fire."

He touched the chair that John Tremaine had just left. Leavitt had often dreamed of the door behind the red rep curtain opening and Mrs. Tremaine coming in. He had never expected so young a visitor. Isobel did not take the chair he offered, but stood behind it, leaning with her muff upon the back.

"You are surprised, aren't you?" she said. "Father has been calling on Mrs. Tremaine, and I took this chance of coming to see you."

Leavitt, in whose mind the face of one woman displaced all others, could not but give Isobel credit for

the beauty she possessed. Her walk through the December cold had made her cheeks red as roses. She wore a little fur hat with a bit of mistletoe on it, its clear crystal globes white against the green leaves. She loosened her furs a little in the warmth of the room, and as she stood behind the chair where John Tremaine had sat, Leavitt could see him still sitting there, the figure of this lovely woman behind him.

"I am delighted to see you," he said. "I was sorry that I did not see you the other day at my office. What is wrong?"

Isobel smiled.

"Must there be something wrong," she asked, "because I come to see you?"

"When ladies go to their lawyer's, there is usually something amiss."

"Life's amiss a little bit; don't you think it is, Mr. Leavitt?"

"Come, come! You should not think so at twenty-two."

"You will never think so," she said calmly. "You are one of those people for whom everything turns to sunlight."

"Thank you, my dear," said the lawyer. "That is very graceful and pretty, and if you will let me return the compliment, I am sure you bring it wherever you go."

The girl nodded her head. There was a grave expression on her usually animated face.

"Sunlight is all very well," she said, "but I am be-

ginning to find out that it does not pay bills to run a household; and, Mr. Leavitt, I have come to see you because something's got to be done."

She used, in this instance, the same words that John Tremaine had used, but her solution was not likely to be the same as his big scheme.

"Father," said the girl, as though she were the older of the two, "is utterly unpractical, and it puts him in such a state of excitement when I speak of money that I don't dare to broach the subject to him. So I have come to a decision, Mr. Leavitt, and I want you to help me."

Leavitt went over and took her hand and drew her round to the big chair and made her sit there; and now, as she did so, to his mental vision, with the remembrance of John's protecting offer, he seemed to sit there holding her with his arms round her.

"I am going to work for my living, and I want you to get me a position."

"My dear child," said the lawyer, who had been unable to work for his living because no one wanted his services and because there were no cases in the district, "my dear child, what can you do?"

"I can keep house fairly well."

She was so lovely as she sat there, her hands clasped on her muff, her young face lifted, that Leavitt's thoughts wandered entirely from the practical question, and he thought of her only as the perfect woman, the mate most decidedly created for such a man as John Tremaine. It also occurred to him immediately

that if John carried out his scheme, working for her living would be out of the question.

"I thought I might be a companion for some old lady," said Isobel, "or teach children."

"Certainly, certainly," said Leavitt absent-mindedly.

"Aren't you interested?" she asked, with a sharp little note of disappointment in her voice. "You see, you are the only person in the world I can ask."

"What would your father do without you?" asked Leavitt.

"What will he do with me, if I stay?"

"Things are so serious as that, eh?" said the lawyer, and he thought as he spoke that perhaps the better thing would be to help her in her intention and ignore the fact—as indeed he was pledged to do—of any other solution of the problem.

"I do not believe there are one hundred dollars in the bank," said the girl. "We owe bills everywhere, and as far as the property is concerned, it is just like Riverside was—mortgaged up to its value and the interest overdue."

Leavitt sighed.

"I have lots of rich friends," said the girl, "but you know that I would rather die than ask their help. I would not even go to any of them as a companion. I want to go to strangers."

"You are quite right," said Leavitt.

They remained for a few moments in silence, and Leavitt watched her in the light of the fire and the candles.

"I do not know, my dear, whether you were informed of it or not, but when the Blythe Mountain Coal Company was formed, John Tremaine offered your father the position of president and an option to buy a great deal of stock."

She looked up, surprised. At the mention of John's name she had flushed.

"Oh! Of course I did not know it. Why did he refuse?"

Leavitt immediately regretted his information.

"You need not tell me," she exclaimed. "He dislikes Mr. Tremaine. He loses no opportunity to show me this. Ever since my accident, he has tacitly forbidden him the house."

Leavitt watched her fire.

"Dreadful, I think, to show such enmity. It is a sort of jealousy, too." And she continued fearlessly: "It is a cloud between my father and me." She turned the information over in her mind and continued: "You do not mean to tell me that for some personal prejudice my father refused the position?"

Leavitt made no response. She waited, and went on:

"Why, it's the most incredible prejudice I ever heard of!"

"Don't speak of it to him, Isobel."

And she added bitterly:

"Oh, no. I never speak of John Tremaine to Daddy." She rose with her last words. "It is late," she said. "Father is to meet me at the hotel. He thinks I have gone to see a friend while he makes his

visit to Mrs. Tremaine. Now will you try to help me, Mr. Leavitt?" She put her hand out to him frankly. "I must look in the papers, I suppose, and answer advertisements; or perhaps put an advertisement in the paper. What do you think?"

She wrinkled her fair brows. Leavitt took her hand between both of his.

"I'll think it over to-night, my dear," he said, "and I'll come over to Malvern some time to-morrow and talk it out with you."

"Please," she urged, "don't lose any time, will you?"

And Leavitt reflected what a frail straw against the wind of debts and mortgages Isobel's effort would be. He took her downstairs himself and stood on the gallery while she walked quickly down toward the little hotel not more than two hundred feet away. Her slim, charming figure, her little fur hat with its mistle-toe, blended in the soft darkness of the winter evening, and he saw her vaguely until she was lost in the shadows.

CHAPTER XXII

JOHN had been shooting at some distance from Riverside and walked home slowly toward the end of the day, taking the path through the Back Pasture. With the rabbits he had shot flung over his back, his gun on his shoulder, he stood at the bars of the old fence, waiting a few moments before going up to the house. It was now eighteen months since he had reluctantly taken down these bars to let Isobel's mare pass through. With the same reluctance he had let her enter his life. Then he had treated her rudely. What a boor she must have thought him! What a crooked-natured brute! Once or twice it had been on the tip of his tongue to say: "I know you love me. I love you. Will you marry a thief? . . . You see what they think of me here in Virginia; you see what I am to-day. You boasted yourself that you knew me under my disguise. Don't you think that I have made up for that past? . . . You say they call me 'Big Tremaine.' Are you big enough to marry a man with a stain on his name? . . . Now you know why I ran away. Now you know why I can't run for Congress."

He had been tempted to say this to her. What would she have answered? He thought he knew the mettle she was made of, the pride of race she repre-

sented. She was as proud as his mother and, some day, Malvern would tell his daughter of the theft; John did not doubt it.

As though she appeared now in answer to his thoughts of her, and would herself respond to his questions, he saw Isobel coming toward him across the fields. She seemed to express the spirit of the land, of Virginia. She was in nut-brown, the color of the riny earth. It was a three-mile walk from her door to the Back Pasture, and the exercise had given her a clear red color like the stain of berries under snow. There was vigor as well as grace in the swing of her walk. She seemed, as she approached him, to sparkle; she was brightness and charm itself, and did not in the least suggest an unhappy love.

"She does not care for me," he thought. "Certainly not deeply." And he could not then have answered honestly that he was glad to think so. Did he want to break her heart? Was he sincere in his process of disillusioning her? Had he positively succeeded in making up his mind to give her up?

Isobel swung a hemlock stick. Her russet boots showed beneath her short skirt. Her coat was open, and her white shirt gleamed like a dove's breast.

She came up to him frankly, holding out her hand, blushing gloriously; and John, apparently ignoring that frank, pretty hand, leaned his gun against the bars and thrust his own hands into the pockets of his shooting-coat.

"Aren't you going to shake hands with me?"

"I have been killing things; my hands are not clean."

"Nonsense! Hunters were made before prejudices."

"I could not touch anything so immaculate as your glove."

Isobel drew her glove off, laughing. Her bare hand shone white as she held it out again. It said to him: "Take me." She wooed him. He fixed his eyes upon her so intently that she looked away and coming up to the bars touched them absently.

"When I came here first, you did not want me to ride over your fresh-ploughed field."

"No."

"Nor did you the second time, either."

"No."

Isobel pulled off a splinter from a silvery rail of the ancient fence. John said:

"Don't destroy my property! You're a vandal!"

She disobediently pulled off the splinter, with a savage little gesture.

"You are more human to the wood," she said, "than you are to human beings." And she started to tear away another bit. John all of a sudden put his hand down over hers. His pulses raced, and in his clasp of her hand he spoke as plainly as though he had said the words that pounded in his breast. He lifted Isobel's hand, held it a moment in both his, then flung it from him, turned, and strode away.

Leaning for support against the bars, tremendously stirred, happy beyond words, her hand, still alive from

his touch, resting on the fresh gash in the wood, she called after him :

“ John Tremaine ! John Tremaine ! ”

Tremaine walked a few steps, then turned, and came back to her. As soon as she saw the expression of his face she regretted that she had called him. The warfare with himself in those few moments had been hard ; his expression was cynical, and the poor girl saw nothing of the feelings she wished to see. The fact that he blamed himself did not make it easier to do what he set himself to do.

“ You called me back,” he said. “ I must return to Riverside.”

He admired her as she stood there quietly, gaining her self-control. Such a brave young creature ! She possessed the qualities he liked the best—straightforwardness, ardor. He believed that, as she had not hesitated on that day to jump her horse over the fence, at no matter what risk, so she would not hesitate to face fearlessly any obstacle in her way. It was bitter to him to realize that he was in honor bound to make himself appear a brute, and that he might not let her see his profound, sincere feelings. But he was determined to cut their relationship short, no matter what it cost him. During the past day or two, he had been on the point of throwing up all his interests and returning to South Africa.

“ Why should we be enemies ? ” he heard her say ; and he answered harshly :

“ Men and women are enemies more often than peo-

ple think. Unless they are in love with each other, they are indifferent; and very often when they are in love with each other——”

She interrupted him. “We only draw our conclusions, Mr. Tremaine, from the experiences we have had. Don’t you think so? Yours must have been very hard.”

He set his mind against the fact of her interest in his experiences. It was just this gentle interest in his life that he had always longed for. Now it had come, and it could not be anything to him.

“My experiences have been those of most men who have knocked about the world,” he said indifferently; “neither better nor worse. I left home expecting little”—he laughed—“but I must say, taking it altogether, things turned out rather better than I thought they would.”

¶ He knew that she would like to ask him why he acted toward her as he did, but she could not put him such a question. He succeeded so thoroughly in his assumption of rude indifference that he chilled her; and then he did the cruellest thing a man can do—treated the situation lightly, as though he took advantage of the difference in their years, as though she were to him nothing but a little girl.

“You mustn’t take people and things too seriously, Miss Malvern,” he said evenly. “There is less romance in people’s lives than they suggest. When I saw you last, you told me that you were going North to work for your living. Were you romancing? I fancy you were.”

He smiled at her as if she were the most casual acquaintance, and he saw how his cruelty told. She stiffened, she grew pale, she half bit her under lip, and he fancied that she was keeping back the tears.

"I was going to see Mrs. Tremaine," she said, "to tell her that I have found something to do and to say good-by."

John drew a breath that was not all relief. If she were going away, it would solve the problem.

"My mother is at home," he said, "and will be delighted to see you."

Isobel shook her head. She wanted to be alone with her emotion, which in a few moments it would be difficult to control. She could not go to Riverside.

"Take her my message, will you?"

"With pleasure," he said, less ungraciously. "What message?"

"That I am going North to-morrow, and that I send her"—she hesitated; the word had never passed between them—"my love."

The light of the winter sunset, red as blood, fell upon the ground about them, touching the cold silver fence to coral, flashing bright along the river, and holding both John and Isobel in its glory as they stood there, the fence between them. He said:

"Then you will not see the Tremaines, if you are going North to-morrow? They are coming for the Christmas holidays."

"No," she said, "I shall not see them." And she

thought of Julia Tremaine with a sudden dreadful ache at her heart.

John did not then connect the two together remotely in his mind, or realize that Julia's return to Riverside would awaken Isobel's jealousy. The fact that she was going away the following day, and that probably he should not see her again, began to possess its full significance. He would be in South Africa when she returned from her little journey into the working world, to find that her father had obtained a small fortune by the sale of his worthless acres. He would be gone. In a second, the dreariness of his future without her, and the new sentimental suffering he was about to embark upon, struck him with all its force. This was the one woman he wanted for his wife. He would have been glad to have picked her up there, at the pasture bars, to have carried her off out of Virginia, out of his past, into a new life. Instead of that, if he had the courage to carry out his plans, he would never see her again. It was the only way out of the maze.

"Good-by," he heard her say.

This time she did not extend her hand, but she stood without making any effort to go.

There was that in him, strongly masculine though he was, brutal though he could be, which throughout his life led him to consider the happiness of others. He had suffered so much himself that he could not bear to see others suffer. The fact that he was likely now to leave an ache in the heart of this woman was intolerable to him. If there was to be any suffering, he wanted

to bear it himself. He believed the kindest thing to do was to break the spell now.

"It is really good-by," he said practically, "because I am going back to South Africa in a short time."

He saw her start, her eyes widen, and her lips part.

"Going back to South Africa!" he heard her murmur; and he said hurriedly:

"Yes, yes! I have had enough of Virginia. I am a born wanderer. I am restless now for the free and easy life I have led for years. You can understand that," he continued tranquilly, as though he tried to take her into his confidence, as one would an agreeable outsider. "A fellow who has had no home and no ties for the best part of his life never wants to settle down."

He let his eyes wander over the landscape, from which the light was slowly withdrawing. Already in the paling sky the stars had begun to appear.

"Take those stars, for instance," he said. "How small and hard they are! You should see them in Africa; they are like great white lamps."

Then he turned to her quickly, with apparent ease. She had not moved from her position by the fence, as though she were immobilized by what he said and what it meant to her.

"You see, during several years I have made some good friends out there, and I want to go back and see them."

He put out his hand frankly, and still smiling in a purely friendly fashion said:

"Wish me good luck and good-by. You remember

what your mammy told you seventeen years ago—that John Tremaine had run away? Just think of him as having run away again—or better still, don't think of him at all. He is not worth it."

He completed his work like an artist. He accomplished what he wished to do; he hurt her profoundly; he awakened all her pride; and above all there came to her the horrible certainty that he knew she cared for him, and that he was disenchanting her as far as he knew how. It was unbearable.

Tremaine saw pain and chagrin bring back the color to her face. He knew that she almost hated him in that moment, and that for the time being he had succeeded in his work. She refused him her fingers; she thrust both her hands into the pockets of her rough jacket and stood straightly, like a charming little soldier, with her blond head held up. The bright hair they had cut off after her accident had grown again and clustered in rings around her ears and brow. She was angry, wretched, hurt as she had never thought any one could hurt her. Even the fact that she would not see him again was clouded by her indignation.

"I do not think you have won your title of 'Big' Tremaine," she said with spirit. "I do not think you have won it. Riches aren't everything. It isn't everything to be a millionaire. There are other riches. . . . You ask me to wish you good luck. I hope you will find people in South Africa who will make you happy—whom *you* can make happy."

He realized in a second more that she had turned right-about-face and left him. She was walking fast across the meadow up to Malvern by the little path, and he was letting her go. His gun leaned against the fence; the dead rabbits hung limply where he had slung them. He stood watching Isobel's figure until it disappeared.

Desolation came upon him greater than any he had known in the desert, and yet he was within reach of the realization of a man's dearest hope. He went back to the house slowly. He saw the smoke from the kitchen chimney rising languidly on the quiet air. The days were drawing near to the Christmas holidays. The servants and his mother had already begun to decorate with holly and with evergreen. He had made the dilapidated old home into a dignified homestead. His mother's future was secure. He had once more established a hearth. He had done the thing a man likes best to do—made a home. He thought of other Christmases, during those fifteen years of wandering: Christmases in mining camps, on the plains, in the African desert, in strange cities, where he had no family and no home.

As he came up to the house, he saw that the barn doors were open. Nolan was telling one of his inimitable Irish yarns to the negroes. John could hear his rich brogue and the negroes' soft guffaws. He heard laughter sounding from the kitchen. Mammy Chloe's voice was loud and gay. The odor of good things

cooking came out into the fresh air as he passed the kitchen door and went unseen around to the front of the house. His dogs ran out to greet him, springing on him, sniffing at the rabbits. They followed him up the porch steps, keeping at his heels. As he came into the hall he heard voices and laughter—his mother's laugh—and his heart thrilled to the sound of the merriment. He realized that the place had been invaded, and that his brother's family had come. As he went into the house like Esau from the chase, he thought that the sons of his brother had taken his birthright. His mother, in a violet-colored dress, stood before the big hearth, the firelight touching her hair and the lace across her breast. She had an arm around the neck of each of her grandsons—two charming boys. She was talking down to them, as he had seen her laugh and talk with David when they were children. He supposed that Julia Tremaine was there, but he did not see her. His mother's voice cried :

“David! Roger! This is your Uncle John.”

The three moved toward him out of the firelight. He heard his new title called by sweet high voices : “Uncle John! Uncle John!” He was seized upon by four young arms, vigorously, authoritatively. He was conscious that a boy on either side of him was talking about the rabbits and the dogs in great delight. Roger, the youngest, held up his face to be kissed.

“Uncle John, may we go shooting with you?

Davey has got a rifle. I am to have one. May we, Uncle John? What bully dogs! Hie! What's their names? Did you only shoot two rabbits?"

They both tore out of the room after the dogs, leaving John alone with his mother. Her eyes were on him with a bright expression of happiness and pride.

"The boys have talked of nothing but seeing you, John. They have been wild to see their new uncle." She came up to him; she laid her hand lightly on the sleeve of his corduroy coat, the brightness still on her face.

He looked down upon her from his height. She seemed to him very lovely and very frail. He saw now that the light on her face shone for him. It was unmistakably for him—not for the boys, not for younger generations, not for elder brothers' sons.

But his mind was absorbed by the figure of another woman—of a younger woman—of Isobel, disappearing over the little rise of pasture land that lay between Malvern and Riverside.

John could not escape his nephews, nor did he try to do so, although they were the sons of the woman who had jilted him—the sons of the brother he did not love. They were both Tremaines, strongly marked with the family characteristics, good-looking, manly little fellows.

He was shaving one evening. One boy sat astride

the foot of his bed ; the other, his elbows on the bureau, gazed with naïve admiration at his big uncle.

"Uncle John, you're one of the dark Tremaines, aren't you ?"

"It looks like it, old chap."

"Neither Davey nor I will be ; botheration ! I should like," said the boy from the bed, "to be absolutely and exactly like you, Uncle John, when I grow up."

"Better choose another model, Roger ; Mr. Leavitt, for example."

"Huh, Uncle John, an old man ?"

"He was once young, Roger."

"Yep, but I never knew him then, and I guess I choose Napoleon."

"Drop my razor, Davey."

"I think I could just shave a little bit off my upper lip."

"Drop it, I say !"

"Uncle John," said little Roger, "when I said I hated blonds the other day, I forgot about Miss Isobel."

"You did ?"

"Yes, we used to see her when we were down here last time. Where is she, Uncle John ?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you know her quite well, Uncle John ?"

"We are neighbors."

"Isn't she a corker ?"

Tremaine looked down into the boys' eyes. David,

though only twelve, was tall and well set up. He had taken possession of his uncle's shaving-brush.

"Why don't you marry Miss Isobel, Uncle John?"

"That's an idea, Davey."

"Neighbors always marry in books." Seizing his uncle's arm, he laughed and insisted, "Will you, will you?" at the risk of causing John to cut himself with his razor.

"Look out!" exclaimed the uncle. "Go easy, old man!"

Roger, who had been very quiet, now said from the bed:

"I like my grandmother best of anybody."

He appeared, arrayed in Tremaine's black coat, which trailed between his legs to the floor.

"You fellows had better go down and see your grandmother," said John, hastily finishing his toilet at the stand. "Get out of that coat, Roger; and if you muss my shirt, I'll wallop you, my boy."

"You're frightfully particular about your clothes," said the little fellow.

Tremaine laughed aloud and picked up his clothes, which he had rescued. He opened the door of the room.

"Now you get out and let me finish dressing."

Just then Mammy appeared in the doorway, and the boys rushed at her wildly.

"Hie, Mammy! Come and barricade Uncle John with us!"

"Fo' de Lawd!" she panted under the assault. "Lemme be, lemme be, yo' little debbils!"

"Tell us about Uncle John and father when they were boys like us, Mammy."

"Not lak yo'-all!" she sniffed scornfully, looking over the blond heads at John. "Ma chillun wa'n't nevah lak yo'-all. Dey was gemmen; you'se jest boys."

Tremaine finished dressing with as much care as though he were not to dine alone with his mother. On the bureau lay a great bunch of violets. He had been raising them successfully under glass, and Mammy had just fetched to him with pride this great bunch from the greenhouse. He fastened a few in the lapel of his coat.

As they sat together after dinner, his mother and himself, the door opened softly, and a small boy in night clothes stood there, red-cheeked, his eyes bright but heavy with sleep. He made a leap for John and landed in his uncle's lap.

"Listen, Uncle John! Come up and sit on our bed in the dark. Please do!"

"Go upstairs directly," said his grandmother severely. "You will catch cold."

Roger's flushed cheek was close to his uncle's; the firelight gleamed in his eyes.

"Hark!" said Mrs. Tremaine. "I hear wheels on the driveway."

"No, Granny, it's the wind," said the child; "I hear it all night long."

"Your stories are too exciting for them, John."

"No, no, grandmother! They're bully!"

"I'll take him upstairs," said John indulgently.

"Nonsense! You will do nothing of the kind. Let him go alone."

Roger slipped down, ran over to the door, and said, from under his shock of fair hair: "Davey thinks mother is the prettiest, but I think Miss Isobel's the prettiest, Uncle John. Are you going to marry her?"

He ran out, beckoning to John from the hall and from the stairs.

When he had gone, his grandmother said in a low tone:

"You heard what little Roger said?"

John's heart was hard as a stone within him.

"You may spare yourself the trouble of speaking to me on that subject, mother."

But she replied with spirit: "I love Isobel as my own child."

Mrs. Tremaine leaned forward.

"You may ruin her life," she said. "It has gone too far. She is unhappy. I believe she loves you."

"Nonsense!" said Tremaine, and added: "If she does, she will get over it. Others have."

"Oh," said his mother, "you are cruel!"

"I think," said Tremaine, coldly watching her, "that if she knew, it would disenchant her. I can't imagine Isobel Malvern loving a thief."

Raising his eyes, he looked at his mother sharply. "Will you tell her?"

"I tell the disgrace of my son!"

"If it would solve the problem?"

"Never!"

"I am glad," he said simply. "We might depute Julia to tell her, when she arrives."

"You insult her." Mrs. Tremaine, who had risen, moved to and fro slowly, her cheeks burning, her whole soul in agitation.

John said, still watching: "There is Sam Leavitt."

Mrs. Tremaine said: "How dare you, John!"

"He has never refused to stand by the family yet."

"Do you call that standing by the family?" asked his mother.

CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. TREMAINE was invited to pay a visit at the house of a friend where Julia was breaking her journey South, and they were to return to Riverside together. John was left with the boys for a week, and in the solitude of the place they were cheerful companions to him. His mother's absence made the place lonely and strange, and he felt restless and dissatisfied. As he walked with Julia Tremaine's sons, he found himself wondering what the mother was like.

For the first time since his return to Riverside, he permitted himself to think about Julia. Now and again, when he passed old landmarks—the pasture, the scene of their parting—an image of her would attempt to force itself upon him ; but with his strong will he brushed it away.

He asked Leavitt :

“What is the measure of a man's soul ? Do you know, Sam ?”

The lawyer stroked his chin before he replied in his pleasant drawl :

“I reckon, John, just as high as he can think.”

“As much,” said Tremaine, “as he can endure.”

Leavitt shook his head.

“No, barbarians and savages can give us examples of brute endurance. It's something else.”

They leaned side by side on the bar of the South Pasture. Behind them the river, flushed with the winter sunset, flowed between its red banks, and before them each window of the old house was red as a rose from the reflection.

"Don't imagine, John," said Leavitt, "that I don't know how hard it was for you to come back to Virginia."

"It was," said John, "exchanging peace of mind for something that is akin to hell."

"I can partly understand," said the lawyer slowly, and John said musingly:

"I don't believe you have the slightest idea what I mean."

"Why don't you return, since it's that way?" asked the older Virginian.

"Since it's what way?"

"I only suggest your going for your sake, not for hers," said Leavitt.

"For hers?" John repeated the words quickly.

"For Molly's," said the lawyer. "It would pretty near break her heart. For your own sake, I think you ought to go."

John stared slightly, and the sunset light was warm upon his face.

"When it gets too much for me, I shall go back to South Africa."

Leavitt looked up at him.

"I can't see that anything would be too much for you, John."

"Running away," said John Tremaine, "is a mighty poor way to solve problems, after all. I ran away once before, and while I made shift to construct myself a new life and, as I said, obtained comparative peace, I should not find that peace there now if I returned."

Leavitt looked at him seriously.

"Something in Virginia has irrevocably destroyed it?"

Tremaine did not reply. His nephews had taken their place on either side of him, and his hand rested on Roger's shoulder.

"I wonder what Mrs. David Tremaine is like?" John said aloud. And little David answered: "Mother?" in the tone a boy only uses for one woman until he becomes a man. "Mother? Why, she's a corker, Uncle John."

"Ah," said his uncle approvingly, "that's the way to speak, old chap."

"And," said little Roger in his dreamy voice, "she must have been pretty when she was young."

Both men laughed, and the boys jumped down from the fence, on which they had climbed in order to be on a more equal height with their big uncle. The four walked over to the house together in the half darkness, the boys hanging on John's arms.

So they came up to the house, but they did not go in together. As they entered, Mammy caught the boys:

"Doan yo' tink fer to go in de pahler wid dem ombrageous shoes, chillun. Yo' stay right heah, an'

Mammy'll get yo' slippers. Go 'long in, Marse John, ef yer feet ain't wet."

Leavitt had left them to go home by the highroad and John saw his nephews struggle in Mammy's powerful grasp as he went through toward the parlor.

In his mother's absence he often spent his evenings in the dining-room, where he spread on the table his maps of the country, and worked in a cloud of smoke. Now he saw a light from the parlor shine out into the hall. Some one was playing on the piano which had never been opened since he had come from South Africa. A woman was singing softly with a voice full of poignant appeal.

John stood in the hallway, transfixed. His mouth grew hard as steel, his jaw set, and his eyes clouded. One after another the scenes of his past rushed on him with a sweep. His heart rose to his throat, he drew a deep breath as the singing ceased. He hesitated a moment and then went in.

The woman who had been sitting at the piano rose slowly and stood where she was. Under the light from the piano lamp, John saw her plainly, distinctly, every detail of her. She wore a black velvet coat; a small hat of soft fur came down upon her hair; and she lifted her eyes and looked straight at John. Just such pictures of her standing straight and challenging, with her handsome head held up and her big dark eyes full on him, he had year by year put sternly from his mind. Now she stood there before him, living, palpitating—a link with the bitter past he hated.

Julia Tremaine, with both hands on the piano lid, waited for him to come up to her. She was sure of her beauty, sure that she had grown more lovely and that she need not be afraid of his judgment of her physical charms. As John, however, did not come forward, she left the piano and moved toward him with both her hands held out. Half smiling, with a subtle comprehension of what the moment was, she whispered, "John! John!" and waited. She could not guess what was in the man's mind.

At the first sight of her, all his resentment faded. For one brief moment, one brief second, she was nothing but the woman herself, the woman he once had deeply loved. Her voice singing, as he had heard it in the hallway, smote him profoundly; then the sudden sight of her—her nearness, her calling his name aloud as in the early days of his exile she had called him in his dreams—all this made him for a moment forget everything but the fact that he actually saw her again.

"Aren't you going to speak to me, John?"

Then, as sharply, the spell broke in him and between him and her; between him and this woman came the face of his brother, the remembrance of the past, the truth of what had been.

John put out his hand frankly, and a light broke over his face, which had been as set as a graven face.

"Of course, I'm going to speak to you. How do you do? We did not expect you till to-morrow. Is my mother here? Why are you left alone?"

Mrs. David Tremaine bit her lip and slightly shook her head, as if she said: "I understand your emotion. It is great and you won't give way."

"She is upstairs," she said, then added softly: "Isn't it strange to meet like this?"

"I see nothing strange," he said shortly. "Things are not often strange. It's only ourselves who are strange."

Continuing he said practically:

"You must be dusty and tired, perhaps hungry. It is tea-time. We have tea here now. We didn't have tea, did we, in the old days?"

The boys burst into the room and rushed at their mother in their catapult fashion. Mrs. Tremaine kissed them. It was a relief. John watched her. She was a good mother—so much to her credit. He had already discovered her boys' chivalrous admiration. She was lovely as she bent over them, proud of them, proud of being the mother of two sons. He fancied she was thinking: "I have cheated him out of this as well; such sons might have been his."

"There!" cried Roger, turning to his uncle, one arm around his mother's waist; "didn't I tell you she was a corker, Uncle John? And what did we write you, mother? Uncle John's a dead shot; he hits the bull's-eye nine times out of ten, and I've a real rifle, haven't I, Uncle John? And Uncle John's the most popular man in the South. I'm awfully sorry, but I'm afraid I'll have to live down here in Virginia, mother."

Mrs. Tremaine and John laughed over the children's heads, and their eyes met in a more natural glance.

"I congratulate you, Julia," he said. And she answered with *empressement*: "I'm glad you're friends."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE following morning, when he waked, he came into consciousness knowing that a great change had taken place in his environment. He had passed a restless night and toward daylight had fallen into a heavy sleep, out of which he was awakened slowly by some one singing. He heard the village clock in Redlands strike the hour, and when the sound had ceased, the singing voice continued under his window.

“I want your love to follow me, follow me
home . . .”

It was Julia Tremaine, and he wondered why she was out so early, and the thought suggested itself that she too had passed a restless night, but, unlike himself, had not caught up with sleep. She sang through the first verse of the song, then interrupted it to call to her children.

“Davey! Roger!”

His window was open. He heard the young fresh voices of his nephews:

“Mother, there are three autos in the stables!” “It isn’t a garage; it’s a stable—lots nicer!” “And there are bully horses! Tom lifted me up on the backs of all of them!”—“And he did me too, mother!”—“Such a bully Irishman, mother! You ought to hear

his brogue!"—"I'm stuck on Virginia, mother!"—"Isn't it great here?"—"Isn't Uncle John——"

"Hush, hush!" and the boys were led away. He could hear the voices soften and the three passed under his window.

But she had known that she was standing under his window, of course. Had she stood there purposely and sung to waken him? That would be like her! Was it like her? What did he know of Julia Tremaine? Julia Cameron he had known, as a young man knows a very young woman about whom there is little to know.

He was fully awake and lay upon his bed, his hands under his head, unwilling immediately to enter into the complexities of his present life; unwilling for a little while to face the change that had come.

He was now under the same roof with the woman who had awakened his first passion. She had been disloyal to him, and he had resolutely determined to forget her. But it had been long before he could think of Julia without emotion, and his final disassociation from her had been the result of determination as strong as was the rest of his character. Now what had she become?

As if to answer him, he heard again the call "Mother!" and realized that she had justified her existence, she was the mother of two children.

As he lay outstretched upon his bed, his hands under his head, he saw before him the simplicity of his small room; he had not changed his quarters, though he had

added to them—and on the chimneypiece lay his gloves, his pipes—a man's belongings. There was not a single photograph or anything personal to another. He had not been able to bring anything personal into his life.

David had founded a family. David had taken from him the woman he had chosen.

He would be impersonal to her. He would not harbor the feeling of bitterness she had awakened; she should be to him nothing but the mother of his nephews and his brother's widow. His life was a busy one; there was no reason why she should in any wise affect it, he said to himself; but he knew that his environment had changed.

An hour later, he walked through the little stretch of woodland that lay at the foot of the meadows. The morning post had brought him letters that gave the impersonal turn to his thoughts that he wanted. One was a strong, vigorous appeal from Brandegee, reading almost like a command, that he should enter active politics. Another was from the Democratic Club in Richmond, urging him in much the same fashion, but with greater deference, to be a candidate for Congress.

Since coming back to Virginia, there had stirred in him the strongest affection for the State. He was accustomed to have people seek him and turn to him. His back seemed built for burdens. Everywhere, all through his career, he had been bearing them. In South Africa, his advice had been sought by many. He was accustomed to consider other people's problems with patience and kindness. Indeed, the broad way in

which he entered into affairs that in no wise affected himself had been one of the reasons why he was known as "Big Tremaine"—perhaps a better reason than the other, which put him high because of his great wealth.

Here in Virginia, from the day when he had first appeared in Richmond he had been sought out and appealed to; and he could not help feeling the power that he possessed, and that, if given the opportunity, he could do much for his own people.

Every one of the demands upon him here had brought with it its peculiar satisfaction. The fact that he could win, notwithstanding the opinion that Leavitt and his mother and Malvern held of him, could not fail to gratify him. Each day and each hour put upon his career and his life before these people the seal of what he was. He knew it.

As he walked in the woods thinking of these things, he again heard little Davey's voice calling: "Mother, mother!" and looking up he saw Julia Tremaine coming toward him, a son on either side.

He saw her before she saw him, and when she stopped with the boys to bend down and observe a rabbit-hole, he stood and watched the group. His first impulse was to turn about and go back before she had seen him. Then he found himself drawn to her by a feeling of curiosity.

The three stood in a little opening in the woods—an opening like a cup in the heart of the pines, flooded with sunlight. As Julia bent with her boys, he saw that her figure was young and charming. She knelt

down on the pine-covered earth, on one knee, the boys on all fours beside her, peering down into the rabbit-hole. As the day was mild and soft, she wore no coat. Her dress was black and close-fitting, with sleeves stopping at the elbows. She had picked up, before leaving the house, a scarf of Mrs. Tremaine's and had thrown it about her shoulders, and she wore a little hat used by her mother-in-law for garden and country use, its violets and the delicate ribbons lightening the effect of her black dress. As she knelt, both her hands clasped behind her back, white and round and appealing in their charm, the darker woods around her and the blond heads of her children at her side, in the warm sunlight, the picture she made could not fail to appeal to the eyes of a man in whom the love of beauty and admiration for women were keen.

"It's no use watching, boys," he heard her say. "The rabbit's gone down to his family. He won't come out again."

"It's Br'er Rabbit, isn't it, mother?" Roger said. "Mammy will tell us about him. We'll ask her. I dare say he's up to some of his clever tricks, under the ground. I wish we could see!"

Tremaine came slowly around the curve of the path, and before she had time to rise she saw him. He could not but be flattered by the red that sprang into her cheeks and by her expression of pleased surprise.

"Oh, Uncle John!" Both his nephews rushed toward him. "There's a great big fat rabbit just gone down into the hole! If you only had your gun!"

She said "Good morning" and held out her hand.

"How nice to meet you out here like this, John! We have been all through the woods. Riverside is wonderfully transformed."

"Yes," he said; "nothing stands still; everything changes."

He turned about and walked along with them, although he had intended going on to the mines.

"No," she said, "there are things that are not affected by the years."

"I suppose," he replied, "you refer to feelings, but you are wrong. They are the most uncertain and capricious of all things."

And she said quickly: "Oh, no. They deepen and grow more profound."

"Uncle John," said one of his nephews, "Mammy says you're going to run for president."

And Julia said: "I am so interested in this campaign and in the politics of Virginia. I wanted David to take an active part. He should have done so. Of course you will accept the nomination, John?"

It was evident to him that she intended to ignore their past. He had not thought of her for years; and her appearance was a surprise to him. She had gained in style and in assurance.

She was smiling at him frankly, as though she said: "I've come back after years into your environment. Enjoy me; approve of me! You see that I have developed well. Expect much of me—I can give it."

"Why did David not go into politics?" he asked abruptly, and added: "Since you wished it?"

"He was devoted to his profession."

"I'm sure your influence on him must have been enormous."

She shook her head. "There you're wrong. He did exactly as he liked."

With her children, Julia was delightful, and during the first few days they followed her everywhere. He could hear their gay voices across the hall as they told her of "Uncle John."

When Tremaine realized that her presence was pleasing to him, he felt a subtle sense of irritation. It annoyed him to feel that the discreet presence of his brother's widow did not annoy him. Why could she not have stayed in the North and have written? He would have solved her financial problems for her better at a distance. He acquired the habit of going early to the mines and lunching there; Nolan would fetch him down sandwiches and beer. And he created for himself duties which would prolong his absence and exile him from the homestead.

One afternoon, as Leavitt was starting out on his daily pilgrimage, John surprised him by riding up and asking for a few moments of his time.

"I won't keep you five seconds, Sam," said John.

"Come in, come in!" said the lawyer. "Twenty-five, if you like."

But he saw by the way that John had begun to walk up and down, his hands behind his back, his

riding-whip in his hand, that he was not likely to see Mrs. Tremaine that afternoon. John said abruptly :

"I told you when I came that I should return to South Africa. Now I want you to help me to wind up my affairs, for I am going in a fortnight."

"Why," said the lawyer, "it will just about kill your mother."

John laughed. "You think of nothing but the woman always!" he exclaimed. "What a faithful man you are! It did not kill my mother when I went away before, and I shall leave her in rather better circumstances now. I want to make my will and give her Riverside and an income. I shall also make a bequest to Chloe. Will you put these things in shape for me as soon as possible, old man?"

Leavitt placed himself on the window-seat, whence he could see the road, where John's horse was being led up and down by a negro boy. He said, nodding at his companion :

"Running away again ; eh, John?"

"How do you mean?"

"Looks very much as though you could not face the music," said the older man ; "and yet I reckon you have come up to harder propositions than this in your wanderings."

Tremaine shrugged.

"It seems too bad," said the lawyer, "when you've at last got a chance of making good."

"Making good?"

Leavitt nodded. "To your mother, for all these dreadful years."

Tremaine swore under his breath. Always of her! He said sharply, stopping in his walk to confront the lawyer:

"For God's sake, man, think just a little of me!"

"Perhaps," pursued Leavitt obstinately, "it is just as well that there is some one to think only of her."

"She is fortunate."

Leavitt smiled. "It never occurred to me to call your mother that," he said, "until you came home."

"She has her daughter-in-law," said John. "She has her grandchildren; she has a fortune and the devotion of the most faithful soul on the face of the earth."

"Ah, yes!" Leavitt smiled. "By the way, I have a letter from Isobel." He touched the pocket of his coat and drew it out.

Tremaine put up his hand. "Don't show it to me," he said shortly; "let us talk about my business."

"You are a singular man, John Tremaine!" said the lawyer. And to his surprise, Tremaine, lifting his eyes to Leavitt's, said:

"I am a damned lonely one."

There ensued a moment's silence between them, after which Leavitt, who had not taken in the full significance of the fact that Tremaine, whom he had grown to love, was leaving Virginia, now said daringly:

"Why don't you tell her, my boy?"

Tremaine laughed. "I should have given you credit,

Leavitt, for more Southern pride than you express in what you have said to-day."

"Oh, I don't know," said the lawyer, with equable indifference; "pride is a poor horse to ride of a cold night. I don't think I have so much pride as other qualities. I think a woman should have every chance to know the man she loves."

"Come!" said John, almost fiercely, "you don't know what you are saying! What do you mean by 'the man she loves'? I am a matter of complete indifference to Miss Malvern."

Leavitt shook his head. "Oh, no!" he said. "Poor little girl!"

"We'll leave her out of the question, if you please," said his companion roughly, "and keep to the one in hand. I have told you what I intend to do. Now if you will be so good ——"

There was a knock at Leavitt's front door. Neither man had seen the visitor arrive, and Leavitt himself, springing up from the window-seat, opened the door for Mr. Malvern.

Malvern did not at once see that Leavitt was not alone, and he began in a hearty voice:

"Glad to find you at home! How do you do, my dear Leavitt?"

He wrung the lawyer's hand with much effusion. His face was excited, and Leavitt, as he greeted his neighbor, saw in him a transformation so great as to be explained by only one of two things—a great and sudden rise in fortune or an unexpected happiness. Mal-

vern put his hat on the table, threw down his gloves, threw back his overcoat, and seating himself in a chair looked up and said eagerly :

"I want a few minutes of your time, Sam. Sit down with me, my old friend." And then he saw John standing by the window, his riding-crop in his hand. The whole expression of Malvern's face changed.

"How do you do?" he said shortly. "I didn't see you. I thought I was alone with Sam."

Tremaine's pleasures in life might be said to be few. At all events, he felt so, and he did not intend to deny himself the pleasure of hearing Malvern's account of the fortune that had come to him. He bade Malvern good afternoon with the utmost graciousness and instead of taking his leave, he settled himself comfortably on the window ledge.

"I came in to see Sam myself on a matter of business, and I presume that you have done the same."

Malvern glanced at him. Dislike and distrust were in his feelings, as well as a certain fear ; and it also angered him that he should feel conscious of John's power, that he should find anything in this man to impel his attention. But if John felt that this moment promised him a certain enjoyment, Malvern felt that it promised to himself a certain satisfaction. He turned to the lawyer and addressed himself directly to him.

"I want you to come with me to Richmond, Sam, if you can, on the night train. I have some business of

rather an important character to transact, and I want you to handle it for me."

Leavitt waited. It was a drama to him of poignant interest—a play whose dénouement he knew beforehand and at which he was at present an unwilling spectator.

"A very extraordinary thing has happened," said Malvern, with the excitement beating back his voice. He picked up his gloves from the table and drew them through his fingers. "A very extraordinary thing."

Tremaine's eyes were bent upon him, as he talked, with a look that to a reader of human hearts was not inscrutable. It was the extraordinary beneficence that shines on the human face when one contemplates an act of generosity for which one never can reap the reward.

Malvern paused and waited, his attention so evidently given to the older man that a sensitive third person should have understood that his presence was undesired. Leavitt, who wished to say nothing, was obliged to speak.

"Why, I am afraid," he said in his soft-cadenced voice, "that it is rather late to start for Richmond to-day, Redmond. It is close on to supper time."

As though he quite knew that the crux of the matter would be arrived at with difficulty before him, Tremaine from his corner said:

"Mr. Malvern, I want you to let me be the first person to congratulate you."

Malvern turned upon him almost ferociously. "What

do you mean, sir?" he exclaimed, as he turned around in his chair and faced the quiet individual around whom the shadows of the room seemed to fall.

"Leavitt doesn't know," John said easily, "but men in coal all know. You see, I am especially interested in the country hereabouts. I heard something of the matter in New York last week."

Malvern turned again to Leavitt and said:

"It seems that Malvern isn't quite as poor a property as we thought, Sam. As a matter of fact, I have accepted an offer of half a million dollars for the mountain land and the swamp." He waited, his enthusiasm, his excitement, the fact that he was a rich man, overbearing everything else in the moment. The sudden change from poverty and distress had almost unnerved him. His hands trembled as he fingered his gloves. There was fever in his cheeks and in his eyes. He had expected to go down to the grave a poor, unsuccessful old man. In the twinkling of an eye, his whole existence had altered. He could hold up his head with the best of them in his set. So suddenly had this come to Malvern that he had not reasoned with it. The man who had made him the offer had hardly left Malvern House before he had called for his trap to drive to Redlands.

The moment to Leavitt was an extremely trying one. He faced something that he disapproved and against which he had no voice. He knew that it was expected of him to show enthusiasm and delight. He could not look at Tremaine.

"I am mighty glad, Redmond," he said sincerely. "Nobody is gladder than I." But Malvern was in no condition to observe shades of feeling in others. He was beside himself with excitement and delight.

"I stopped at the post-office," he said, "to send a telegram to my daughter. She shall come home at once. That little enterprise is fortunately at an end."

There were a dozen questions on Leavitt's lips that he would have liked to ask, but he asked none. Malvern went on, speaking to him—not to Tremaine:

"I have sold it to a New York company," he said. "I dare say I was unwise in accepting the first offer; but I am no business man any more, Sam; and I want to put all my affairs in your hands."

Leavitt shook his head.

"Redmond," he said, "I'd like to oblige you, but"—and he took the decision as though clients were besieging his doors—"I am thinking very seriously of going out of business."

Malvern stared at him, then laughed. "Nonsense!" he said. "You will go into my business, and it will keep you occupied."

He rose; a fever of nervousness marked all his actions. Curiosity was too strong for him, and he asked of John, grudgingly, as though much against his will:

"May I know how you happen to be informed of this so soon, Mr. Tremaine?"

John came forward, taking up his hat and riding-gloves. His moment, which he had purchased with a

half a million dollars, had come to an end. Isobel would not have to work for her living—he had solved the problem of her future.

“There are no secrets in mining cliques, Mr. Malvern,” he said easily. “I am pretty well informed of the outlook in the district.”

“If you wanted to buy my property,” said the old man acidly, “it is too late now.”

John bowed. “So I see,” he said. “If the Blythe Mountain Company wants it, it will have to pay a big price.”

CHAPTER XXV

JOHN had succeeded in carving his own career with a master hand. From the moment when he had set out on his lonely career as a very young man, he stopped at no obstacle in his pathway. The words of the bank president which had affected him were commonplace enough; but they had been a guiding principle in the life of this man.

"Admit no obstacles." John had admitted none, and the result had been great material success. In his life in South Africa, women had played a secondary part. He had been too deeply wounded, he had grown too sentimentally bitter, easily to love again, and he met all women with distrust.

However, as a result of his daily intercourse with Julia, he was obliged to change to some extent his preconceived opinion of her. She had developed into a different woman from the one he had expected to meet. And while he made up his mind that he would not understand her, would not give himself the trouble to study her, he was nevertheless impressed by her. With his mother he felt that she labored under a disadvantage. He knew his mother's prejudices and how hard it was to win an inch of her affections. She was gracious to Julia, but never affectionate, whereas Julia,

affectionate and sweet, was almost humble in her devotion to her mother-in-law.

Leavitt had dined with them, staying *sans ceremonie* at the close of his belated afternoon call on Mrs. Tremaine, and after dinner they discussed the change in the Malvern fortunes in the living-room.

Mrs. Tremaine accepted the news with more calm than John would have expected, and Leavitt appeared singularly lacking in enthusiasm. The greatest impression was made upon Julia.

"Isobel will now be able," she said, "to marry any one she wishes."

"And," Mrs. Tremaine remarked, "Isobel will return."

John said nothing.

To Mrs. Tremaine, John's attitude toward his brother's widow was inexplicable. It revolted her that the rich son should apparently take so little interest in the financial needs of his brother's widow. In her eyes, he had before him a glorious opportunity to repay now in full a sacred debt. Nor could she understand Julia's attitude toward John—her extreme consideration, her desire to charm and please him. It was unsympathetic to the proud, reserved mother. She had known nothing of her younger son's sentimental interest in Julia Cameron, for their engagement had not been made public. She thought to herself: "John must now do a great kindness. It will only be a return for a far greater one—for a moral and unforgettable kindness in John's great moment of need. Can

money—ah, the vile thing!—can money play such a terribly important part in human lives? He must repay David through Julia.” But she did not know how to appeal to her son.

It was at this moment of her anxiety for her son’s children—keener than her anxiety for her son’s wife—that she contrasted terribly her two sons. David had been a child to her until the last. David consulted her, appealed to her, in everything. Full of imagination and very expansive, he had continued to charm his mother until the end. Now, as she thought of the fact that he had been unsuccessful in the last years and had left behind him no such material record as her younger son was making in spite of the blot on his name, she became jealous for David and doubly jealous for his children. Mrs. Tremaine had no idea that her daughter-in-law knew anything of John’s misdeed. She believed that David never would have told of his brother’s crime.

“Julia,” she said to her daughter-in-law, “you must speak to John.”

“Not,” said Mrs. David Tremaine, “if I starved in the street.”

“You must speak to him, for the boys’ sake.”

“It would come better from you, mother.”

Mrs. Tremaine compressed her lips and made no reply.

“It would be bitter enough,” said Julia, “to accept help from him.” And Mrs. Tremaine, looking at her quickly, asked :

"Why bitter?"

And Julia realized that her mother-in-law was ignorant of her relations with John in the past.

Julia suggested hesitatingly: "Would not Mr. Leavitt——?"

And her mother-in-law said, shaking her head:

"John would take it badly, I think, from any one but you."

As they spoke, Tremaine himself came into the living-room, and Mrs. Tremaine, acting on an impulse, beckoned him.

"John, we were speaking of you. Won't you sit here for a moment? I was saying to Julia that since she came down we have not talked together about"—she hesitated. How strange it was that it should be so hard to speak to him the name of his brother!—"about David's affairs." She stiffened a little as the name passed her lips and John saw her suffering.

Julia was sitting by her mother-in-law on the sofa, and as Mrs. Tremaine spoke, she covered Julia's hand with her own, as though she took her under her protection. It was the only caress John ever saw his mother voluntarily give to her daughter-in-law.

John stood before them, looking down on them both quietly. Both women felt that he would be a man of whom it would be difficult to ask a favor.

"John," said his mother quietly, "Julia will not put the case before you, but I am going to do so. You can understand that it is impossible for me to live at Riverside in luxury—a luxury to which I often feel I

have no right—while David's sons and his wife ——” she stopped.

Her younger son did not move his eyes from her face. She was appealing to the outcast, to the forgotten, neglected black sheep. He crossed his hands behind his back and stood waiting, as though determined that whatever words were spoken should be spoken by her.

Many things rose to Mrs. Tremaine's lips, but she was so instinctively loyal to her own that before a third person she would not speak a word that would put John in the wrong.

As soon as he saw the suggestion in her eyes of something that looked like tears, he removed his glance from her face and turned to his sister-in-law.

Julia sat in the corner of the sofa, a little away from her mother-in-law, one hand and arm lying on the red brocade of the lounge. She was looking away from both of them. Her breath rose and fell a little unevenly; she was agitated, and he knew that there was distress in her eyes.

Her black dress fitted her like the sheath of a flower in the fashion of the times. She had been a pretty girl, and she was a very handsome woman. She was more beautiful even than she had promised to be when he knew her a girl of seventeen. She sat now with her head a little bowed, her eyes on her hand which clasped Mrs. Tremaine's.

The picture of the two women on the sofa awakened in him mingled feelings. Their absolute dependence

on him, his mastery over their fate unconsciously gratified him, but it was bitter to him to feel that in the eyes of one of them at least he was forever dishonored, and that the other, in girlish tyranny and sentimental caprice, had once cut him out of her life. He was intolerant with himself every time there awakened in him for a moment any sympathy for her.

He spoke curtly, harshly, to drown his gentler feelings :

“ Nothing is really as tragic as we make it, you know. Don’t look so distressed. Of course I shall provide for Julia and the boys.”

How inexplicable he was, she thought ; how strange ! She glanced from him to her daughter-in-law and saw Julia flush hotly.

John stood immovable, looking at the woman who might have been his wife and have made his fate, and whom he was now, by one of those inexorable tricks of circumstances, obliged to take care of. It might have aroused, in another man, a feeling of triumph to have looked upon just this situation, but there was no triumph in his heart.

He saw her embarrassment and his mother’s tremor. He wanted to put an end to this situation, and as quickly as possible relieve the minds of both women.

“ Come,” he said practically ; “ as I said before, there are very few tragedies in life, Julia. Don’t let’s make one out of a question of mere money.”

For the first time he stirred from his rigid position

before them. He went over to the fireplace, took a cigar from his pocket, and stood before them, smoking. There were the holly wreaths about the room and in the doorway hung a great bunch of mistletoe, under which Roger had caught and kissed every member of the household, including Tom Nolan.

Tremaine did not feel himself an inquisitor as he asked :

“David had been speculating in sugar before he died, hadn't he?”

“Yes.”

“And he was speculating in sugar”—Tremaine took a few puffs at his cigar—“seventeen years ago, when I left Virginia. He was fond of Wall Street, even then.”

Mrs. Tremaine exclaimed to her daughter-in-law :

“Julia! I didn't know that David speculated?”

“Oh!” exclaimed the widow, “what was the use of telling you?”

John continued. “There are some outstanding notes of David's, amounting to about seventy thousand dollars, if I'm not mistaken.”

Julia exclaimed in spite of herself: “Why, how do you know that?”

Tremaine shook the ashes from his cigar into the fire:

“I have taken up all of them.”

CHAPTER XXVI

TREMAINE had been occupied all the morning at his desk in the office at the mines. The residents of the settlement that had sprung up were Hungarians, Italians, and negroes, and he was frankly feared as well as loved by them. The Italians had attacked the negroes, and his decision had been swift and summary. The men had been committed to the town jail, and at present the opinion at the mines was unfavorable to the "boss." But the radical action was soothing to his spirits. He enjoyed enforcing this justice and was indifferent to Leavitt's warnings regarding the feeling against him. In his little room he passed several hours of the day, filling the position which no less a man than himself could fill, for he was in reality a combination of financier, manager, and "boss" in one. Here at his desk he hammered out future combinations and also held an arbitrary court. Little disputes were settled before him; the local magistrates were his friends and coadjutors. Now, through his little window, as he sat before his desk, he saw the surrounding forest and the delicate harmony of the winter woods, where above the pines the crows flew over their rude, empty nests.

Leavitt strolled in this morning with the news that a delegation from Richmond were determined to tramp over to urge upon John the Congressional nomination.

"All Virginia could not force me into politics now," said Tremaine. "It is too late."

"Nothing has ever forced you, has it, John?"

"Fate has," answered John.

"Fate," repeated the lawyer, "is a poor excuse. There is something in a strong man like you that stands up against Fate."

"It is nearly twelve o'clock," continued the lawyer, looking at his watch. "Won't you walk back with me? It is the prettiest day you ever saw."

"I'm lunching here, Leavitt."

Leavitt made a grimace. "On Hungarian stew or Italian macaroni?"

"On a sandwich and beer."

"I reckon I'll go then and keep the family in order."

"Keep my mother company," said Tremaine.

At the door, Leavitt stopped to light a fresh cigar. John bent over his writing and said:

"Why don't you marry my mother, Leavitt?"

"Sir!" exclaimed the old lawyer, crimsoning, "how dare you, sir!"

"She will need you very much when I have gone back to South Africa. Don't be ashamed of the divine fire." John smiled. "The long devotion has kept you beautifully young, Sam. Love is becoming to a man like you."

Leavitt, after striding half-way across the room, pushed the rude pine door open and went out, slamming it behind him so that it rattled in its casing.

Tremaine again absorbed himself in his work. In defiance of the stove system, he had made the builders

put in a big brick chimney, and he burned cedar, pine, and great knots of hickory in his room. He looked at the friendly glow of the fire, he heard the friendly voices of the crackling logs.

He opened and began to read some South African papers he had fetched with him here. The news was two months old, but fresh and interesting to him. He began to absorb himself in the Johannesburg news. The voices of the Veldt, the immense distances which had made his home for so long, now called him just as Virginia had made herself heard, but the appeals were different. Virginia, passionate, yearning, full of promise, full of imagination, with all the charm of his youth, had cruelly brought him back. Virginia had promised him those things that a man can only receive from his home; the things a man can only find among his own people; the result of those ideals whose birth and cult are nowhere but in his native land. Virginia had offered to put the crowning touch to his life; he had been offered love here. Now it seemed that the appeals were false and untrue—will-o'-the-wisps dancing in the marshes. He turned his newspaper pages and saw familiar names of men whom he had known as insignificant, and who during his absence had become rich and successful.

But now the Veldt promised him those things a man looks for when certain hopes are dead, when certain ways are forever closed. It promised him repose after his agitated years; the blessings of forgetfulness in a place where he had no memories.

Tremaine folded up his papers—he would go at once, now that Christmas was past. He steeled his heart as it protested at this decision.

He continued to meditate on business and enterprise, determined that his human interests should be swallowed up in the excitement of making a new fortune. The figures grew under his pencil; he was adding up columns, when he heard young voices, and the boys, with their mother, come along together up to his window.

Little Roger knocked on the pane. “Can we come in, Uncle John?”

Tremaine opened the door for them. They came in like wild Indians, with whoops and shouts, and threw themselves against their uncle like savages; their cheeks crimson, their eyes bright, their voices high with excitement, they could not fail to dispel the moods of a disillusioned man.

John sparred with them, managing them with one hand, to their delight.

Julia, to whom he had slightly nodded, stood quietly by the door, and when John had rolled both his nephews into the corner and imprisoned them behind chairs, he laughed at his victory.

“Boys,” said their mother, “I want you to go back to Granny. Come, take your caps and run along.”

They were too accustomed to obedience to protest, and still continuing their “rough-house,” they fairly fought themselves out of the door.

No sooner had Julia closed the door after them than

she turned and with the quality which above all others pleased him, she frankly said, holding out her hand :

“I can never see you alone at the house, and I have come boldly down here to do so. I want to thank you for what you have done for my children.”

She stood quietly, tall and graceful in her widow's dress. There was not a note of color about her but her bright lips. Even her eyes and hair were, as little Roger had said, in mourning, too. As though she had not fully expected him to take her outstretched hand, she put both hands in her muff and came slowly over and stood by the table where he had been working.

“You asked me not to thank you. I know what you mean, of course; but you must understand what a weight you have lifted from my heart.”

Tremaine made no response. She touched the table with her hand and looked about the room.

“This is where you have made another brilliant success, isn't it?” she said. “Brought plenty out of ruin. What miracles you work! How wonderful it all seems!”

He did not invite her to sit down, but she did so in his big chair. The expression of her face was grave and composed.

“Cannot we be friends?” she asked simply. Before he could answer, and in order to prevent his doing so, she continued :

“I seem to drive you from the house. You keep

here by yourself all the time. It's not fair. It is better for me to go North at once. I shall tell mother that a telegram has called me back. I'll leave the boys."

Tremaine did not immediately recall the fact that her house was not habitable, that her suggestion was an empty one. He had no intention of letting her think that her presence affected him in the slightest degree, and he said coldly :

"I am always very busy. I am not accustomed to a home or companionship. I come here from choice." And his manner almost told her that her presence in the house was a matter of complete indifference to him.

"I am glad," she said eagerly, "that I do not drive you away. I ought to realize how far back in the past everything is." Then she repeated : "Can't we be friends ?"

"You don't really expect that, do you ?" he asked curtly, picking up one of the papers he had been engaged in sorting.

"When you speak of expecting," said Mrs. Tremaine, with a slight smile, "I have given up expecting things long ago."

"You will minimize your disappointments then," said John practically, "and your joys will be the sharper."

She repeated in a low voice : "My joys ?" And before he could reply she bent forward, slightly animated, and said to him, taking him swiftly into her confidence :

"You have not any conception what my life has been, John."

John put an elastic band round the papers he held.
"I never wondered. I don't now."

"One long terrible disillusionment."

She was evidently stating to him a fact. There was no doubt about that. He put down his papers and looked at her. Her large dark eyes were raised to his with the confidence of a child.

"If what' you say is true," said Tremaine, "it is unfortunate; but will you spare me the details, Julia? And understand me when I say that they cannot possibly interest me. It is past midday, and in a few moments I shall pay two hundred men their week's wages. It would not be pleasant for you to be here with a gang of dirty Hungarians and Italians."

He saw her bite her lip, and that quick little action—an old trick of hers—brought her back to his remembrance as he had known her of old, when everything she did possessed for him an acute charm.

"I am rather a savage," he said, less brutally; "I have the reputation of being a rude man, so you won't be surprised if I live up to it."

Julia put her muff on the table. She leaned on it and looked up at him; the tears sprang to her eyes. She said in a low voice:

"Don't I know? Don't I understand it, John? Your heart turned to bitterness. I know what made you hard and rude. Why, I would not be surprised if you struck me! Let's be frank," she continued, "just frank. You are big and generous, and wonderfully kind to others. Try not to be too—too cruel to me. I

am so wretched, so utterly wretched ——” The tears in her eyes brimmed over and she put her head down on her muff and shook with emotion.

“Julia,” he said, less harshly, “control yourself. In a few minutes this room will be full of workmen. You must go back to the house. Come!”

But he did not touch her on the shoulder nor move from where he stood. After a few seconds, Mrs. Tremaine raised her head, wiped her eyes, pulled her veil down, and drew her furs about her throat. As he walked with her toward the door, she said:

“I didn’t want to come to Virginia, heaven knows. There was no excuse I could make to your mother. She would not have understood. While I am here, make it as easy for me as you can. Won’t you, John?”

She paused at the door. From outside came the toot of Tremaine’s motor, which Nolan had driven down to fetch his master. The twelve o’clock whistle had blown, and through the window they could see the first line of workmen coming along the path that led to John’s office.

“You must let Nolan drive you home, Julia, and send the car back for me.”

But she lingered. “I came down here,” she said determinedly, “for a purpose; and I am not going back without it, John.”

“I am afraid,” said Tremaine, opening the door of the cabin, “that this time you will have to go back exactly as I send you, Julia. I am in the habit of being obeyed.”

"How hard," she murmured, "life has made you."

"Very hard indeed."

"How hard I made you, John—*my* work."

He smiled. He accomplished his brutality like an artist. "Oh, no," he said easily, "you must not blame yourself for that. There are very few women whose influence over a man is strong enough to change his temperament. Don't blame yourself. Think about other things. There is no reason why our paths should cross. Nolan!" he called to the Irishman, "run Mrs. Tremaine home, will you, and come back for me at once?"

CHAPTER XXVII

Now that he had definitely made up his mind to return to South Africa, Tremaine took a certain comfort in the thought that once again he should put behind him, at a great distance, problems and difficulties that he saw no way of solving for himself. Having emphatically closed the door upon his hopes, he shut out for himself forever an ideal of home. Once again, he planned to lose himself in the excitement of impersonal enterprise, and would not let himself acknowledge, as he looked forward to taking up new undertakings, new schemes, that he would fail to find in them such vital interest as would make him forget the hunger in his heart. It had been different before. Poor and unknown, he had everything to gain, and he could forget himself in the joy of battle.

On his trips between Richmond and Riverside, for his affairs often took him to the city, he meditated on what he styled to himself his thoroughly unsuccessful life: thoroughly unsuccessful, because he had failed to secure to himself happiness or its possibility.

His relations with Julia were impersonal, and he could not fail to appreciate that she evinced the greatest delicacy in her attitude toward him. Still, whenever he came into the house, it seemed to him that she was there, whether accidentally or purposely, under his

eyes and at his side, and for the most part alone. During the interval of years, since she had been his brother's wife, her mind had not gone to waste. She had developed agreeably; she was a well-informed, entertaining woman, besides being a seductive one. If she used her powers to draw and charm him, she was so clever about it that he was not aware of her campaign. In spite of himself, he found her interesting, and little by little they mutually drifted into seeking and prolonging the conversations which at first they had both avoided.

His mother kept very much to herself or devoted herself to the children. Now and then he wondered if she did this purposely.

Malvern and its sudden fortunes was a topic to them of constant interest and speculation. But Isobel did not immediately return. Instead, her father joined her in the North. But Redlands and Riverside knew that improvements were to be made on the Malvern property and that another run-down plantation would be restored.

Julia had the good sense never, while they were together, to return to their relations in the past. She was thoroughly impersonal, with the result that before John knew it, she had established their relations on an entirely new basis. He could remember agreeable conversations upon topics of the day intelligently discussed by a woman of the world. He could remember glances that were withdrawn before they had any meaning. He could remember a soft laugh and a flat-

tering interest in everything he planned or thought of doing. So well carried on was Julia's campaign that he had actually been drawn into telling her something of his life. And once, at the close of some incident in the earlier part of his career—a period of time in which he had suffered and suffered alone—he paused to look up at her, and saw tears in her eyes, and heard her murmur: "Poor boy!" Tremaine had abruptly broken off, and it had been several days before he brought himself to speak of anything of the sort again.

Her children around her added to her charm. Their love, her good sense, and her strength of character, combined to win from him a respect which he gave her grudgingly.

But above all, more dangerous than all, more important than all—she was a woman, a free woman, and a seductive one.

He had hoped to leave for South Africa early in January, but before he could prepare for his journey, a complication in the affairs of the Coal Company obliged him to postpone his departure. He came back to Riverside one evening, wrapped in his fur coat and driving the motor himself. He felt defeated, as though he were an animal driven into a covert; and it was with a feeling of obstinate and almost dogged determination that he turned to his affairs.

Each day he received letters and pamphlets from political circles, urging him to step into the field of politics. One evening as he looked up from his work, he was conscious that once again he was alone with his

sister-in-law, his mother having gone upstairs with the boys. Julia sat in a big chair, screening her face from the firelight.

"It's too bad, John," she said. "Oh, it's a terrible, terrible shame!"

He paused in his act of destroying a pamphlet and asked sharply: "What's too bad, pray?"

"That you can't run for Congress."

So she was going to take up that question too! Agitate him anew on the subject!

"I can't understand," he said disagreeably, "why my career should be of such tremendous importance."

Quite immobile, she sat there before him, looking up at him, and said, scarcely aloud:

"I know the cloud you are under. I have known it for years."

He paled, stared at her, bit his lip, then gave a cruel laugh, and said savagely:

"Of course you do! Just one more added to the number! David told you, did he?"

"Yes," she said, "he told me—and I pitied you then. Please believe me."

He turned away from her and walked across the hearth-rug and said over his shoulder to her, shortly:

"I don't want your pity, Julia."

But before he had gone from her half a dozen steps, tortured as he was by events and circumstances, John understood that her pity had in it a vast deal of sweetness. Before he had turned back, Julia had risen and stood before him, holding out her hand.

For days he had been resolutely turning his thoughts away from her, as he had been keeping himself away from her in reality. Her personality was a pervading one, difficult to escape, enchaining, fascinating. She knew her charm and used it. He appreciated it, and realized that she never came into the room where he was without making him conscious of her presence. She was, moreover, the first woman who had spoken to him in sympathy of this hideous complexity, and she was all sympathy now, her eyes soft and bright. She seemed, as she stood there then, to push away the curtain between the past and the present, and to go back into the old days, leading him with her; and he felt, in that moment, the dangerous rush of tenderness that only comes with the need of love, and the call of it, and the desire for it.

But Julia could not have known by his expression that he was anything but hostile to her. His brow was dark, and his expression stern.

"John," she said—and in the agreeable modulation of her voice, in its lowered tone, there was everything of feeling, with just the shade over it that keeps feeling from passion—"John, you don't know, in these years, how I have followed your lonely footsteps. They echoed in my dreams!"

She saw his face soften, and understanding that he must not come to her too suddenly, did not push her chance but said: "I want to know everything that has happened to you in all these years—the slightest little details of your struggles and of your success. You

haven't even told your mother ; she doesn't know your adventures. You must have had many. John, it doesn't make any difference to me what you did before you left Virginia. Instead of going away from you all these years, I've been coming toward you."

But she did not come toward him now. Instead, as she watched his face change and saw the response to her coming in his eyes, she withdrew ; the hand she had extended to him dropped by her side ; she turned away a little ; and watching her intently, he saw her color fade as her emotion deepened. She caught her underlip with her teeth, and the snow-white went down into the red of her lip. Her eyelids drooped, and there were tears under them.

Her voice, her tenderness drew him back, as she desired, into the intimacy of the years before, and yet it was not the simple, innocent intimacy of their youth. He went over to her, took both her hands, as they hung by her side, and lifted them in his. Then, as he felt the warmth of her flesh, a tumult of feelings surged within him—overmastering desire to crush her in his arms, reckless rebellion against the fate that had destroyed all his best hopes and inspirations. She was looking at him steadily, the tears bright upon her lashes.

"No, John, no !" And she drew herself away. "You don't believe in me ! No !"

Her withdrawal and the sense that she was trying to escape whipped his desire. With an exclamation, unintelligible to her, and which was really only a half-

cry of passion, he drew her toward him ; but before he could kiss her, Mrs. Tremaine's step fell upon the stairs outside. He set Julia free, and turning brusquely from her, left the library by way of the dining-room, his eyes clouded, and a frown upon his face.

He went directly to his room, and before dressing for dinner, stood in the open window, looking moodily down into the valley, where the sweep of the country was toward the mines and Malvern House.

The bedroom door was burst open by his nephews, who flung themselves against him.

"Uncle John," said Roger, "we are going to lock and barricade the door and keep you in prison until you tell us the end of the caravan story. You were just setting out for a lion hunt when you came up with poor Nolan."

CHAPTER XXVIII

JULIA and Mrs. Tremaine saw John this evening in a new light. He was charming. It was their grandmother's wish that during their stay at Riverside the children sometimes should dine with them. On these occasions, the dinner hour was advanced to half-past six, but little Roger, early as the hour was, sat dreaming and almost dozing by his grandmother's side.

A pleased expression was upon Mrs. Tremaine's face. She felt that something new had come into the relations between John and Julia—a spirit of mutual responsiveness and of mutual excitement. John seemed nervous, and Julia seemed to be suppressing a feeling of elation. She glanced from her son to her daughter-in-law and thought: "Why, this would be a solution. If Julia knew, why would this not be the solving of the problem?"

Little Roger, scarcely raising his drowsy lids, said:

"Mother, get Uncle John to tell you about Tom Nolan."

Tremaine shook his head, but Davey, who had not waited for an invitation, began:

"Why, Nolan got lost in the South African desert and was captured by the natives. Wasn't he, Uncle John?"

Davey's voice assumed an irresistible brogue. "Tom

Nolan is from Cork. When Uncle John found him at last, he was lying unconscious behind a clump of bushes, he was ; and Uncle John saw him, all covered with flies and sores. Didn't you, Uncle John ? ”

“ Davey ! ” exclaimed his mother.

“ Let him go on, Julia,” said his grandmother.

“ Yes, Granny,” said the boy gratefully. “ Uncle John carried him back with him—didn't you, Uncle John ? And nursed him back to life. Didn't you ? ”

“ My people nursed him.”

“ Is that all ? ” asked Julia.

“ No, it's a whole book,” replied the boy.

“ Shut it up, Davey,” advised his uncle, “ and put it on the shelf for the night.”

“ But you have not heard what Tom Nolan was,” urged the boy. “ He was the bravest man in Rhodesia, Uncle John says. When the natives tortured him, he never gave a squeal ; he made Irish jokes as long as he could speak. ‘ Faith, an' they couldn't understand me, noways,’ he said—didn't he, Uncle John ?—‘ and Oi thought Oi moight as well jolly 'em as curse 'em.’ ”

Every one laughed at Davey's mimicry, but his eyes were fixed on his uncle alone for approval.

“ And, Granny, when they heated up the fire to roast him alive, he stood there all tied with ropes cutting into his flesh and said : ‘ Put on more wood, bhoys ; that fire wouldn't roast a pig.’ They were howling and yelling like mad things around him—weren't they, Uncle John ?—and he just sang out : ‘ Long live the King ! Don't make such a rumpus ! It's only Tom

Nolan ye've got! There's better than me free, thank God! "

There was a spirit in it, even as the child told it.

"But it seems they didn't roast him, Davey," said his mother.

"No," said the boy; "he was so brave and made such fun that they took him down and left him, like I told you. And Uncle John found him there."

At that moment, as his personal history was being recounted, Nolan himself opened the door and said to his master:

"Shure, it's the long-distance from Richmond, Mr. Tremaine."

And John sprang up, glad of the excuse that would take him from the house this evening.

"I'll answer it," he said to Nolan; "and be ready to order the car. I may have to go to Richmond."

From the door he said to them: "It's a long distance from Richmond to Rhodesia, isn't it? Good night."

The following day he started for a long tramp and climb. He determined to tire himself out physically. It was one of his ways of overcoming his fiends. He wanted to bury himself in the fragrant winter forests, to lose himself in the wilderness.

The trail, after skirting the tract of land which he had sold to the Coal Company, started up the hills which formed the boundary of his property. Slippery and uncompromising, the trail was nearly blind. Rugged and stony, it wound its hilly way to a point of land known as Blythe Rock—a perch hundreds

of feet above the river. He had not made this excursion for many years and went at it like a climber in the Alps. In his boyhood, this had been a real adventure, and it had left its memories. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when he reached his goal. He threw himself down on the ground, tired but exhilarated. His pulses were quick with the excitement and the exercise, but as he felt the cold breeze blow over him, he realized the folly of lying inert, and rising walked to and fro, the mountain wind on his cheek. The high plateau, dominating the valley, gave him a bird's-eye view of the land, and he stood there like a pioneer of old. He found that he had a cigarette or two, lit one and smoked peacefully, looking down on the scene before his eyes.

Down at the mountain's foot were ranged the cabins of the mining settlement, and along the river the shanties of the Italian laborers. He could see the outlines of his farms and gardens, and seen from here they looked like the miniature playthings of a child. Virginia seemed to sleep like a hibernating animal in the gentle Southern winter. Here and there above the patches of live oaks, green as in summer, the smoke from Redlands chimneys rose faintly like breath from living lips.

Blythe Rock stood before him. In his boyhood the mass of stone had seemed a tremendous thing. Its blank face had looked down on these scenes through the ages; over the Indian raids, over the coming of the sturdy pioneers, over the marches of Washington's armies and

the marching of the Federal troops. And now it looked down on the regeneration of the land by John Tremaine

He touched the rock. It was cold, ponderous, and immovable. The mammoth pines around him rose high. There was peace in their branches and beauty in their forms. He looked down at his bare hand as it lay against the surface of the stone. His hand, that human thing, so much less immutable, was possessed of a greater power than the things by which he was surrounded. Under the skin, his veins ran blue with his vigorous blood. His skin was fine and elastic. He had proved the power of his hand and the strength of his body. He was proud of it; he had trained it, he had kept his body under. He had been able to say that in a great degree he was master of the temple and of his desires. He had permitted no excess or waste of its force and its vitality. Was he now to allow himself to be vanquished in the human struggle?

As a boy, he had made bonfires here, had dreamed of adventures in wild countries. He had dreamed as well of life. Now his past lay back of him, insignificant as the toys of a child. He had loved his home and had been proud of his material achievements; but now he felt that all was insignificant except mental and moral achievement. There was nothing in material victories that could bring to him the joy he longed for.

CHAPTER XXIX

As John came to the door of the cabin, he observed to his surprise the figure of a woman standing quietly in the dusk. At first—for he could not distinguish her in the distance—he took her to be the wife of one of his workmen. As he approached and saw the figure of a lady, the idea that it was Julia came upon him with a sort of aversion. It was Isobel, standing quietly in the shadow, dressed in dark traveling clothes, her furs wound around her neck. She made a tranquil note in the tranquil evening; back of her was the edge of the forest, and over her head the early winter stars.

As he came up to her, he said cordially: "I am very glad to see you back. But you should not be here, you know, in this part of the country. You should never come to the mines."

He was shaking hands with her in the semi-dark.

"I wanted to see you," she said simply, "on a matter of some importance, and I took the chance of finding you here. However, when I came, I saw that the cabin was dark, and I was just about to go away."

John took a key from his pocket, opened the door, and went in, striking a light as he did so. Miss Malvern followed him into the cabin. He lit an oil lamp and put it on the table, threw down his hat and stick, and then let himself look at her. The mental heights

he had reached this afternoon had cleared his face of its usual moody, melancholy expression. He had so determined to sacrifice everything, and so fully made up his mind to his acceptance of his fate, that he felt he could be more himself with this young girl who had returned and to whom, when he parted from her, he had been such a brute.

Isobel's face was grave. She had changed even in the short interval of her absence. Her brief contact with the world had already matured her.

"No, thank you," she said, "I won't sit down. I have only a few words to say to you, and as you told me, it is not prudent for me to be down here very late, and my father will miss me. I have come only to . . ."

And what Isobel had thought so simple, now that she faced it in the presence of John Tremaine, was not so easy as she had fancied.

Tremaine himself helped her.

"You must let me be one of the first to congratulate you on your good fortune, of which I have heard."

"I came to speak to you about that."

He held her with his compelling eyes, and as she looked at him and saw on his brow the reflection of the light which his late mental victory had shed, the girl realized how much she loved him.

"Fortune," said John quietly, "sometimes comes to us too late. Almost always it comes inopportunately. To many it comes before they are prepared to receive it, before work and struggle have strengthened them. Now, in the case of your father, Miss Malvern, it has

come just at the right time. He will make good use of his money; he will resume his old activities; possibly go into politics. Indeed, he can do anything he likes. If it had not come, life might have gone very hard with him."

He saw the effect of his words, and he was dominating her intentionally; but he did not realize how strong a woman the girl was.

"You say that life might have gone very hard with my father. What do you mean by that?"

"I think that Mr. Malvern would not have lived very long without a great change in his affairs."

He knew her love for her father. She did not look at him, but stood by his work-table, as Julia Tremaine had stood—but what a different woman!

"It has been a very great change, indeed."

"He is, in a way, only coming into his own."

John knew what she was thinking. He could see the state of exhilaration, of exultation, of happiness in which she had found her father. He knew that she had before her eyes the picture of a rejuvenated, happy man, with a life before him, instead of the sordid despair and the inevitable destruction that comes with actual poverty.

He was particularly struck this evening by the musical sweetness of her voice as she spoke with control and dignity.

"I came to tell you that I shall return to the North to take up my position again; that I shall continue to support myself. I had thought of trying to support my father ——"

Tremaine smiled. He wanted her to look at him. He could control her better that way. She did lift her eyes, and he instantly held them.

"That," he said, "would be an intensely foolish and quixotic thing to do."

"I am not possessed of an income," said Miss Malvern.

"Your father is, however, of a comfortable one."

She threw back her head and, the color flaming into her cheeks, she spoke to him the same words that his mother had used under such different circumstances: "Why did you do it? Why did you do it?"

He wanted to lie to her. But there was something in her that absolutely prevented him from telling her an untruth. She seemed a heaven-touching peak that called only to the highest things in him.

"You think I am responsible for this?" he said.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in a voice that shook with real passion, "you could not make me believe anything but the truth even if you wanted to."

He smiled. "You do not know the facts. Your father has received no more than the good fortune he deserves."

Before she could speak again, he continued with insistence: "You have no right to suggest to your father an idea that might destroy his happiness."

She shook her head.

He urged again: "You cannot deprive your father of the enjoyment of the last years of his life?"

There was a silence. He saw her waver. Then she exclaimed:

"Why do you weave a net around me! You have made me an absolute prisoner!"

"That's not true. I can't see that you have anything to do with it."

"Why," she exclaimed passionately, "he would rather break stones in the quarry than be indebted to you!"

"Remember," said Tremaine, with something of his old roughness, "that you have purely imaginary reasons for what you say and think. I neither deny nor affirm. You must regard it as you see fit. But if you should tell your father your suspicions, he would not believe you. Not only that, but I should refute them. Moreover, to take away from your father now that which has reinstated him and made him a happier man than he had ever dreamed of being, might cause his death at his age. Don't you know it?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, turning away from him and going toward the door. "What a singular man—what a strange man you are!"

"Possibly," said Tremaine.

"I'll never touch a penny of the money," she said coldly. "I would work my fingers to the bone rather than use it. Perhaps I shall find some way out of it. To-night I am bewildered."

"Let me say to you," he continued, his hand on the latch of the door, "that I owe a tremendous debt to Mr. Malvern. Years ago, when I was in trouble, he said a few words to me that were of incalculable importance in my life. I always promised myself some day to make some return."

There was a slight clearing of her troubled face.

"Was that your motive?" she asked quickly. "To pay back a debt?"

He smiled. "You are taking it for granted that I am a factor in this transaction. I make no such acknowledgment."

She could not bear to stay longer. In spite of her anger against him and her passionate rebellion that he should play any part in her life, she loved him and could not overcome the charm of his presence. He opened the door, and the cold sweet air met them.

"I will take you home," he said; but there, in the shadow, with a dog on either side of him, stood the negro Tim.

Isobel did not extend her hand. "I am quite safe," she said, "with the boy and the dogs. Good night."

She nodded shortly and turned from him, and it seemed to John that she was always turning from him.

CHAPTER XXX

TREMAINE had made in one wing of the house a little study, in which he sometimes locked himself away from the boys. In the big, rambling dwelling, it was not easy to secure seclusion. Even the fact that "Uncle John" was working could not keep his nephews from their stormy games in the corridors. Mammy's kitchen was under the room, and through his window he could hear her singing and crooning; but the sweet old songs did not disturb him. He could hear Nolan, too, discoursing to Mammy of affairs in the East; and he wondered which of the points of view—that of the Irish soldier or of the woman who had been a slave—was the most savage. But on this afternoon, the whole place seemed deserted, and for a long time he had sat before his table, tranquilly smoking and writing. The window in front of him opened above a little gallery, in the summer covered by a vine of yellow roses. He looked down over the meadows to the fences of the lower pastures and to the hill beyond which lay Malvern.

The winter afternoon was mild and clear; now and then a snow-bird perched on the rails of the gallery and called.

A step fell along the gallery, and Julia Tremaine turned the handle of the long window and came in, shutting the door behind her.

"John," she said, "I want to talk to you. There is no one at home ; I knew you were alone here."

In his meeting with Isobel in the cabin at the mines, he had felt fully the completeness of his renunciation. His life seemed made up of it—the laying down and giving up of everything that a man values. This afternoon here in his study, he realized more than ever the barrenness of his life. He felt that nothing ever could relieve the desolation of his spirit or save him from a life of everlasting solitude. Then Julia, palpitating with warmth and beauty, came to him, and the thought flashed upon him : " Why shall I not take what fate has left to me ? Why shall I not find forgetfulness in the caresses of this beautiful woman who is ready to make me forget ? "

She sat down by his table, leaning both arms upon it and bending over them, her face lifted to his.

"John," she said, "I've thought of nothing but you——" and he knew that she was thinking of the moment when he had been ready to take her in his arms. But as she had then drawn near and yet kept him away, so now she held her distance and tempted him the more. "I can't tell you how ambitious I am for you. I want to see you fill the place in Virginia you were meant to fill. Don't be quixotic now ; don't sacrifice yourself any further. Run for Congress ! Do—do !"

She stopped, looking at him fully, clearly, and her eyes were not fathomable in this moment.

He was looking at the oval of her cheek, into which

the color had beaten warmly. He was looking at the deep indentations of her mouth, at her dark hair that made her neck and ear so dazzling white by contrast. Down in the old pasture, when she was a girl, he had held her face between his hands in the moonlight and kissed her, trembling.

"My interests," he said, "have suddenly become very precious to you, Julia."

"Not suddenly, John."

He laughed—broke the spell abruptly, turning his eyes away from her, looking through the withered vine leaves to the blue horizon where Malvern hill melted softly into the light.

Julia had not moved. She was trying to win him, to find him, and to hold him.

"Do you remember," she asked in a low tone, "the day we parted—down there in the Back Pasture, by the old fence? You had been dreadfully jealous at the ball in Richmond. You surprised David and me, and you thought he had kissed me. You were like a madman, John; nothing would make you believe me. It is true that when David came back from college he charmed me, as he charmed everybody. Look at your mother's worship. It is true I was a fool, and that I flirted with him, and that I let him think I cared. But that he ever replaced you in my heart, or took from me what I gave you, John,—never, never!"

She raised her eyes to him with her last words.

"You were cruel that day, by the pasture bars, John. You listened to nothing I had to say. You maddened

me. You made me angry and obstinate. You accused me of every disloyalty, and I was foolish and vain. I wanted to make you suffer, and I let you think what you liked. After you had gone ——” she stopped and said no more.

In the silence that fell between them when she stopped speaking, his eyes came slowly back to her, and he saw her sitting there almost meekly, having said, in a way, all she could—having made a warm and honorable *amende*.

He had followed her, and affected as he was by her personality, he nevertheless heard her excuses, her explanations; and simple and direct as he was himself, he could not in this moment disbelieve her. Because, under her magnetic influence, he wanted it all to be true, he believed her.

She unfolded her arms, which were linked together, and picking up a pencil, began lightly to draw a line or two on the paper before her, and she broke the intense spell between them—broke her end of the thread off short. Her expression changed. She withdrew into herself and away from him. He began to resent it.

“Julia,” he said, leaning forward to her.

But she got up from the table quickly. “I must go. The children are waiting for me. I must go.”

A moment earlier, he would not have let her escape him; but he did now, merely rising from his chair and standing by his table, where she left him, looking at her with mingled emotions as she

quickly went from the room, shutting the door softly behind her.

She set out to please him.

He was conscious of her everywhere ; he let himself drift, and did not fight against the charm of her presence. Why should he ?

Whether she so arranged it, or whether it were by chance, he saw her everywhere ; until there came to exist that constant propinquity that is so appalling a factor in life, and which becomes either a necessity or a burden. It began by being a burden, and was close to becoming a necessity.

In Richmond they were invited out together. He accompanied her on the train, and he saw her please and charm every one whom she met. But she seemed always to be thinking of John, trying to anticipate his wishes and to win his approval. If she sat opposite him at table, it was to John that she looked, to John that she laughed. He knew how quickly he could cause the color to flow into her face. People began to speak of them together. He knew Isobel would hear it. And he drifted.

Once or twice, they met by chance in the woods, and the boys were with her. Once Leavitt was of the party. John had taken her all over the mines, and she had been intelligently interested. She showed him her admiration and her humility, but she never laid aside a certain measure of reserve.

When he came into the house in the evenings, she

was there with the boys, under the light of the hanging lamp—graceful and charming. They clung to her, and their love seemed part of her fascination—an unexpressed appeal. She seemed to know that the rôle of motherhood was an ornament to her—that she appealed to John through the boys.

Sometimes he found her with his mother, sewing, embroidering, talking ; or else he found her alone at the piano, and then she played and sang for him while he sat and smoked.

He had said nothing to her of any personal importance since she had come to his room and then had abruptly left him. And although the effect she had upon him was great, she made no apparent demand ; but John felt her everywhere, waiting, waiting—and it angered him to believe that Fate and circumstances were thus enmeshing him.

He knew that his mother was watching him, and that she was troubled. He would not let himself be alone with her, because he did not intend to be questioned.

He heard, as one hears such reports, that Isobel was engaged to a man in the North, and he wondered whether she would do such a thing out of pique ; and then he said to himself that he ought to rejoice if it were true. The breach that had come between them widened, and he crushed far down in his heart his love for her ; and the second best was drifting in to fill the empty place.

One night, when he came into the house, it was raining

heavily, and he was soaked to the skin. This time, he came into a deserted house, and was glad that no one saw him come home. When he had bathed and dressed and had gone down, hoping to be still alone, Julia sat there by the fire, in the shadow, but John had entered and closed the door before he saw her, with the red light falling on her hands and breast. She smiled as he came in.

"You must have been frightfully wet."

"Yes, it was a nasty storm."

"I love to ride in the rain, to walk in it, to feel it beat on me. Listen! How it is beating on the pane!"

The fire of the logs crackled and cried out with its voice of cheer; and against the window, as she spoke, the storm dashed its wings.

He had thought that exercise would tire him out physically; now he found that it had only stimulated. He was never more conscious of her than at this moment, as he came over and stood between her and the fire.

He realized that she was not, as usual, in black. She had put on a softly colored gray dress, and it brought out her vivid coloring to perfection.

The eternal warfare between his senses and his spirit had been going on in his heart and mind for weeks. He had gained heights in his lonely years, but now he left them every day further behind him as he descended into the valley where his feelings and hopes were on a lower plane. Distinctly domestic and idealistic, strong and primitive, he had kept his ideals of love and home

—kept them through adverse conditions—held himself, in a way, for their realization, even while he knew that because of the stain upon his name he never could realize them.

As he looked down at her now, he was conscious that his feelings for Julia were not what love should be. All that afternoon, riding across the country, battling with himself, he had tried to tire out desire. When he had crossed the threshold of this room, he had been farther away from her in thought than in a long time, and it was Fate that put her there before him now in the firelight.

Her flesh had at once the qualities of warmth and light. She wore her sleeves short at the elbow, as though she knew the beauty of her forearm, where the veins were blue as gentian under the delicate skin. There was, in the way she offered herself to John, constantly appealing to him, a humility that could not fail to touch him.

She wore a flat lace collar fastened by a beautiful jewel, bought in a moment of extravagance by her husband, when his stocks were running high. The firelight fell upon her neck and throat, which the low collar left frankly bare ; and the flickering light played on her cheek and shone through the tendrils of her dark hair, that seemed to imprison the light and suffocate it.

From the low chair where she sat, she looked steadily at John—quietly, with a sense of her power over him and with her understanding of his needs and of what she could give him.

"I know what you're thinking, John."

He laughed slightly and could hardly control his voice.

"I don't believe you do."

"You want to go back to South Africa."

"I shall go back."

"Into that distance and loneliness."

She struck the note that had sounded to him with all its melancholy for years.

"I have my work."

"It's not enough—it can't be enough—for a man like you."

"You need not trouble about me," he said, searching for words.

He stood a little distance away from her, and the space between them vibrated as though with a palpable current. He found his eyes fastened on the beautiful arms that lay so white on her lap. His look was a caress, and it traveled up, along her figure, enveloped by the red, fluctuating light. She was breathing quickly, her lips were parted. With all she knew of feeling—and it was much; with all she knew of love—and she had learnt to love him—she called to him.

But he did not move. He was fighting still against what would be, in the next few moments, the irrevocable.

She sighed, got up from her chair, and came quickly to him, putting both her hands up against his breast; and she looked up at him, her lips parted and a sudden rush of emotion transfiguring her face. She only said his

name: "John, John!" and he knew what she offered, and that she would go with him anywhere.

He seized her shoulders almost brutally in his strong hands and held her at a distance, looking at her lips. The desire to crush her in his arms battled in him with the finer feelings born and strengthened during the years of his solitude and introspection. Then there came before him a pale spirit picture of Isobel as she had stood facing him in the cabin at the mines. He dropped his arms and drew back. He stood with clenched hands, while Julia sank down by the chair she had left and buried her face in her arms.

"You don't love me, John. You don't!" he heard her sob. "Can I never make you love me?"

And as he looked down at her, appealing as she was, he knew that what she said was true—that he did not love her. And it was as though the wind of passion blew the ashes of dead fires across his face.

CHAPTER XXXI

ON the following morning John left for Richmond, on business, from there to go on to Washington and New York, and he was not sorry to have an excuse for leaving Riverside and Julia.

While he dressed and Nolan was putting the last things in his bag, he heard Julia in the next room, talking to the boys, and understood that she had risen early in order that she might say good-by to him.

The evening before, the boys had rushed in upon them in the library, fallen upon their mother, and seeing her in tears, little Roger had challenged him fiercely, asking him if he had made his mother cry. Instead of sending them away, Julia had kept them with her, and it was John who had left the room, giving her up to her children. She pleaded a headache and had not come down to dinner, and Tremaine, scarcely sleeping that night, was sure that she too had not slept. But he did not see her until he went down to get into the motor, and there she sat in the corner, waiting for him, and they drove away from the door together.

They drove out into the bright cold, down the avenue, and into the Redlands highroad before either of them spoke. What he should have said to her was to ask her to be his wife. He could not say it; he could

not ask it. At times, he seemed held in a mesh from which he wanted forcibly to extricate himself; and then again he was convinced that it was his fate.

He said: "It's good of you to have gotten up so early, Julia."

"You have often gone away alone."

He appreciated her silence, and that she did not tell him that he never need to go away alone again, or to return to an empty house. He put the fur cover closely about her. Her hands in their gloves lay outside on the fur.

"It's cold," he said. "You should have brought your muff. Better put your hands under the rug."

Instead, she put one of them quickly and lightly over his, and without turning her face to him, her pure, pale profile as cold as wax against the morning light, she said:

"I hate to have you go."

He covered her hand with his. It was soft and flexible in its thin glove. It seemed to melt in his like wax—to take the mould of his own. It was a thoroughly feminine, soft, and yet absorbing hand. But before he could enjoy its possession, or draw her nearer to him, she took it away and turned to him, laughing, the seriousness of her face broken by one of her most charming smiles.

"I hate to have you go, John," and her voice only expressed friendly regret. "If I could have made an excuse, I'd have gone to New York."

"Come," he said, bending toward her, "without any excuse!"

She shook her head and laughed again. "I'll invent something to do—canvass for you!"

The cold wind blew against them, and they took the side of the road to let a negro and his mules pass them awkwardly. In the distance Leavitt came toward them on horseback, and he stopped, lifting his hat and bowing to them as they slowed down to go by.

He was grateful to her for her change of mood, for her good taste and good sense and her delicacy; for during the rest of the drive to the station she was impersonal, charming. The color came back into her face; she met his eyes simply. She seemed to lift the burden of his feelings, and as he got out of the motor and left her, she waved to him gaily.

The business which called him to New York was engrossing. He passed most of his days in Wall Street with his banker, and in conference with men interested in South Africa. He arranged also for his nephews' trust fund and for the income he intended securing to Julia. As he made these arrangements he thought to himself that the situation could not continue as it was. He must marry Julia and accept this decree of fate; after all, he might have a worse fate than that of marrying a beautiful woman who loved him.

When he arrived at Redlands on his return, at ten o'clock at night, there was no one at the station to meet him, and he thought instantly that something had happened to his mother. He walked home the two miles and at the door was the motor, standing a little to one side. The door was opened by Mrs. Tremaine herself

“We could not meet you, John, because we had to send Nolan for the doctor. Davey has been very ill.”

The doctor himself was just coming out of the living-room, with Julia by his side. She wore a white dressing-gown; her hair was loosely wound, held together by a few great pins; her face was strained with watching, and her eyes were troubled. As she caught sight of John, she came forward with something like a little cry, and said:

“Oh, I’m so glad you’ve come home, John! Davey’s been asking for you all day. Will you come up to him?”

She put her hand on his arm with an air of tender possession, but withdrew it as quickly, and he saw in her the mother touched by anxiety, her heart wrung. He gave his coat and things to Nolan and followed Julia up the stairs.

He remained in the room of the sick child until close to dawn. As soon as little Davey had been taken ill the day before, he had called for his uncle, and as his fever heightened, and he became delirious, the obsession grew with him; and although on one side of the bed, opposite the mother, John bent with the tenderness of a woman, the little boy did not know him until well on in the night. Then he asked for stories, recalled their games together and clung to his uncle’s hand. Finally, the medicine left by the doctor took its desired effect, and toward morning the little boy dozed.

All night long they were alone together in the

room of the sick child, and she was brought nearer to him than she had ever been before. He was conscious of her in a new way—touched by her—and in everything she did, as their hands met over Davey's bed while they performed for him the duties of nurse, she seemed to appeal to him and to call forth his tenderness. Her dressing-gown, open at the throat and belted in by a soft cord, the loose sleeves falling back from her arms; the careless way that her hair was gathered together at her neck; her anxiety, the pallor of her cheeks, and then, once or twice during the night, their swift suffusion with red when she looked at him,—all affected him. She had never tempted him more, and when finally, toward morning, he left the room, after Davey had fallen asleep, she followed him to the door and stood with her hand upon the knob, reluctant to open it for him.

He went down to the library and saw the gray of the morning coming in through the windows and the room was filled with the gray light. On the hearth the fire had been kept burning, and in the long window Isobel Malvern stood looking out into the coming day.

Nothing could have been more surprising to him, or more strange, than to have found her there in that room. He came into the room jaded, oppressed, disturbed, and the presence of this girl was as refreshing as a window letting in the clear air. As he touched her hand, it was like brushing a flower or dipping his fingers in the cool waters of a lake. Everything about her had, to him, always the quality of refreshment.

"Where did you come from?" he asked, almost as one might have asked a spirit.

"From Malvern. Your mother telephoned me that little Davey was very ill. I have been here all night with her, waiting."

"How good of you!"

"Oh, no!" she said; "quite natural."

"Davey is much better," said John. "I mean to say, I've left him asleep."

"Yes," said the girl; "so I've just heard."

He realized how little he had seen her and was seized with a fear that she would disappear—that he should not see her again. He smiled at her vaguely, as she stood there in the gray, unreal light.

She went through to the dining-room and came back presently, herself bringing hot coffee which Mammy had prepared. She placed it before him on a little table and served him herself. Every trace of the embarrassment which was often between them disappeared in this hour, when she met him after the vigil of the night. She said she had persuaded Mrs. Tremaine to go and rest. She knew how anxious the mother must be. She was womanly and gracious, and with a sense of rest John watched her charming hands busied about the little service. Leaning his head back on the cushions of his chair, he watched her, and the room by degrees grew lighter. The library, facing the east, would shortly be filled with the sunrise.

When Isobel had given him his coffee, she went over to the window and drew the curtains together.

"Won't you go and rest?" he said. "You must be tired out."

He heard her say "Presently" and supposed she had gone, and in spite of himself his eyelids closed and he dozed, half conscious that she had not left the room. Indeed, he was not fully asleep, and he fancied that she came round behind his chair and leaned over him. As, exhausted and tired out, he fell more profoundly into slumber, he imagined that he felt those cool, lovely hands upon his brow. They seemed to smooth away the moods and heaviness that had so long brooded there; they seemed, like the fingers of an angel, to lift the melancholy that always touched his face. Was it imagination only, or did she really bend above him?

Julia Tremaine came into the room and found Isobel sitting by the table, and she lifted her hand in warning to the woman she had not seen for some time. Julia came in softly, the marks of weeping and anxiety on her face. She glanced at John, who slept, and at the girl who sat tranquilly by his side as though she had a right to be there. She bowed her head to Miss Malvern as if to say: "I understand; he must not be disturbed," hesitated a moment—for she had come to find John and, now that her boy was out of danger, to seek the solace of his presence. She stood for a few moments between the door and his chair, and then, half smiling at Isobel, as though she understood that he must be left to rest, she went out of the room as quietly as she had entered.

When John stirred finally, he was alone in the room

into which the sunlight entered triumphantly in spite of the half-drawn curtains. He came to himself slowly, and the night seemed like a dream. Only the little table before him, with the coffee cup, where Isobel had served him, proved to him the reality. He rang for Nolan and went upstairs to bathe and dress. The house was silent ; there was no sound from the rooms that Julia occupied with her children ; his mother's door was closed. Beyond him was the wing that he had arranged for guest rooms, and he wondered where Isobel was resting.

When he went into his room and shut the door, he was alone with the strongest conviction he had ever had in his life. Since Isobel could not be his, he would have nothing. This second-best, offered to him after distrust and despair, meant in reality nothing to him but the physical satisfaction he would not in this way take. As soon as he could arrange his affairs, he would go back, as he had planned to do, and he would go back alone.

CHAPTER XXXII

SUDDEN prosperity intoxicated Mr. Malvern. He had been so disintegrated by misfortune that he had not planned out for himself a future ; and now, instead of wandering the seas of life like a derelict, he found himself once more taking an active part in the traffic of the world. If physical relief from anxiety came as a salvation to the man well beyond middle years, it seemed to have a rather disastrous effect upon his character. He developed a certain arrogance that was more than pride ; he took his position with something close to a swagger, in those affairs that are open to a man of means. Malvern had little idea how his attitude and even his interest in public affairs affected his daughter. For the first time in their lives, there was a lack of sympathy between them, which, however, the father was too absorbed to appreciate.

When Mr. Brandegee in Richmond suggested that Malvern should take a position on the board of directors of the Blythe Mountain Coal Company, Malvern, after very slight hesitation, accepted. Now that he was a rich man, his point of view and his attitude toward John Tremaine became somewhat changed. Tremaine, rich and properous, pulling the wool over the eyes of people who were not aware of his turpitude, receiving on all hands marks of distinction, was a hard pill for a

poor, proud neighbor to swallow. But now that Malvern could take his place among his fellows as before, a certain leniency stirred in him toward Tremaine. At all events, he no longer felt the bitterness toward Tremaine which he had felt since the day when Tremaine had offered him the presidency of the Blythe Mountain Coal Company.

Mr. Malvern, too, began to take an interest in politics. He understood why John did not run for Congress, and he promised his support to the man suggested in John's place.

"Tremaine," he said to his daughter, "will doubtless marry his brother's widow. It would be a most suitable affair. They were in love before John left Virginia. It seems that he is very attentive to Julia Tremaine. By the way," he continued, "you have not seen your friend since you returned from New York, Isobel?"

Malvern knew well what a deprivation it was to his daughter to sever her sole intimacy.

"You are pale," he said, "very pale, my dear. You need a change."

Malvern House was in the hands of renovators, but the library had been kept more or less intact, and Isobel stood by her father's side, arranging flowers in a glass bowl.

"We are always going away," she said. "Ever since your good fortune, Daddy, there has not been a place to rest the sole of one's foot." (She might have said: "Or one's heart, either," for that matter.)

Her father put his arm around her. "You are an extraordinary girl," he said. "Not once have you shown the slightest interest in what you call our good fortune."

"I am glad for you," she said sincerely. "How could I help being?"

"And I am glad for you," returned her father, without realizing that all his plans and interests had been purely masculine, and that he had done nothing to please the girl.

"Is it finally decided," she asked, "that Mr. Tremaine will not run for Congress?"

"I believe so," her father returned indifferently.

"It's a pity."

"Wallis is a very fine chap," returned her father. "He will fully represent the district."

Isobel repeated the name with scorn.

"Tom Wallis, instead of John Tremaine! No wonder politics don't make more interesting history."

"What do you know about Tremaine's political talents?" her father asked sharply.

"Not any more than the country does," said his daughter simply. "The whole district is crying for him." She put into the bowl the few last flowers she was arranging, and looking up at her father, said simply: "Now that you've power, Daddy, and your word has weight, why don't you support Mr. Tremaine and make him run?"

Malvern laughed shortly. "I don't think," he said

caustically, "that John Tremaine is the sort of chap that can be 'made' to do things; and if he were, I should not be the man to urge him into politics."

"Why not?" asked his daughter. "Since you're really interested in Virginia now, why not get the best man there is to represent you?"

Her words startled her father. He put down the pamphlet he had been reading and looked up at her keenly.

"The best man in the district?" he repeated. "That's speaking very strongly, little girl. And why, after all, should you take such a vital interest in Mr. Tremaine's career?"

"I am interested," said Isobel quietly, "most especially to know, Daddy, why you dislike him so much?"

"He is utterly indifferent to me," said her father testily; "he has the type of temperament that is antipathetic to me. You know nothing about him—no one knows anything about him."

Mr. Malvern opened the pages of his book, his mind disturbed, and Isobel did not pursue the question. She went slowly out of the room and upstairs to her own quarter of the house, where in her bedroom she had turned over for many months one thought in her mind.

Malvern House on its hill commanded a view of the valley, the sloping land, the forests, and the river. It was late; the stars were out, and there was still the ghostly light of a waning February moon. She drew her curtains and looked out across the fields to where,

in the distance, she could see the lights burning in the windows of Riverside.

Mr. Tremaine would doubtless marry his sister-in-law. Her father said so, and she had heard the gossip of her mammy, in whose mind the wedding was already arranged. The pain in her heart refused to be silenced; the longing for him never ceased, and she was helpless. Her whole heart yearning toward Riverside, she stood looking into the night.

During the following fortnight, they all saw a new Isobel. The young girl seemed to have given place to a woman. She came freely to Riverside—always alone; sometimes riding, sometimes driving, sometimes on foot with her dogs. To Mrs. Tremaine, her visits were fresh and delightful. She found how she had missed her, how impossible it was for any one to take the bright and exclusive place Isobel had made her own; and as there seemed to be between her son and the girl no understanding, as Isobel's devotion was completely for herself, Mrs. Tremaine began to be more at peace.

Isobel acted with a beautiful frankness and a beautiful boldness. She broke down all barriers between Riverside and Malvern. She seemed to have dared to unlock for herself the door of paradise and to have entered in without hesitation. She was witty, gay, charming. The children adored her. To John she was the ideal woman. There was everything in her that he admired. He sought on every occasion to prevent finding himself alone with Julia. Little

Davey's illness kept her somewhat confined, and she grew desperately unhappy, nervous, jealous.

It was Isobel who suggested to Mrs. Tremaine that her father should be invited to dinner, and Mrs. Tremaine extended the invitation with reluctance. Malvern accepted, and so did Leavitt; and that night John, for the first time since Davey's illness, devoted himself to his sister-in-law. She responded with eagerness, and Malvern was deceived, for he could observe no understanding between his daughter and the man he distrusted and disliked.

When the others had gone that night, while still the horn of the motor could be heard as they rounded the curve below the river road, Julia came into his study, where he stood alone. He was not surprised. He had expected it, and he was prepared for what she had to say, as much as a man can be who feels himself at fault and feels himself, nevertheless, animated by the brutal intention to have his way.

"John," she said, coming up to him swiftly and putting both hands on his arms; "John, I can't bear it. If it's any satisfaction for the past, you see how you've made me suffer."

"It's no satisfaction," he said shortly.

"I told you that I asked for nothing, but that's not true. I will take what I can get."

"Whatever there was to have, you threw away."

"No, I seemed to. I didn't really."

"It's no use, Julia."

"John, I can't live without it."

He looked down at her as she stood clinging to him. In her evening dress—she wore one in spite of her mourning—she was frankly beautiful. The marks of her anxiety about her child, the passion with which she had been struggling, made her face serious and doubly appealing. She murmured :

“John, there’s nothing”—with a slight inclination of her head toward Malvern—“there’s nothing there for you, my dear. You see, if she knew ——”

“You’ve nothing to do with that,” he said roughly ;
“nothing !”

“I know, I know,” she accepted almost humbly ;
“but you can’t go on forever, John—alone.”

He turned from her. Her hands fell by her side. He went over to the window and stood there, his hands in his pockets. She joined him, as though she did not wish to let him beyond the influence of her touch and nearness. Again he felt her hand on his arm.

“No one could put herself more at your feet, John ——”

“A man doesn’t want that,” he said. He was conscious that she was shaking with emotion, and the seduction she had had for him, indeed all the power she had ever had over him, turned to supreme pity. Without looking at her, he covered the hand on his arm with his.

“You said there was nothing for me over there”—his eyes were turned in the direction of Malvern—
“well, there’s nothing for us here, Julia. There’s

nothing for me anywhere. Seventeen years ago, things were made like that."

"Oh, John! I wish . . .

Her meaning was clear in her tone. He took her hand and led her as one might lead a child to the door. She was weeping openly.

"Just as soon as I can get away, I shall return to South Africa."

She buried her face in her hands.

"Go to your children," he said in a low tone, as he held the half-open door in his hand. "At least you've got them."

She wiped away her tears with her hands, uncaring, and lifted her face, stained with its emotion, to him.

"Kiss me," she said and repeated: "Kiss me."

He bent and did so, and for a moment she clung to him desperately; but he let her go and stood with his hand on the door until he heard her own door close gently beyond the children's room. Then he went downstairs, got his hat and coat, and went out and walked far beyond the mining settlement into the forests. When the morning came, eight o'clock found him in his cabin, building himself a fire of pine knots. He made himself some coffee there, and without having been to bed at all, telephoned to Nolan to fetch him down his day clothes, for he was in evening dress.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TREMAINE found Leavitt at home after luncheon, peacefully reading—more for his amusement than for anything else—the brief of one of the few cases he had actually pleaded in his youth. He sat under a portrait done by Baker of his mother—a gentle beauty in a white dress, with soft eyes and graceful head and throat. There was something in the picture that suggested Mrs. Tremaine.

After making himself comfortable and lighting a cigar, John said, pointing over his shoulder through the long windows:

“From here, Sam, day in and day out, you’ve watched like a sentinel the windows of the woman you love. You’ve lived here like a hermit, like a recluse, for the sake of an idea. You’ve seen my mother’s fortunes fall; you’ve seen her take life as she found it; you’ve seen her isolation, and you’ve ——”

Leavitt sprang up from his chair, his face crimson as a boy’s might be under a sudden ardor of surprise and anger.

“How dare you?”

John’s expression was benignant in its look of understanding and appreciation.

“Oh,” he said gently, “my dear chap, don’t protest; don’t be ashamed of a fire which another man would

give worlds to feel kindled in his own heart. Don't be ashamed to have her son speak to you."

He extended his long brown hand. "I love you for it, Sam."

John's daring was so great, he was so sincere, that Leavitt was transported by his frankness into the realm of thought in which he constantly lived. John opened the doors for him on the kingdom that he was always trying to shut away. He took his chair again and sank back in it, his hands resting on the arms. He sighed heavily.

"I want you to marry my mother."

"You are an extraordinary fellow!"

"I am a natural man, Sam, though my life is an unnatural one. I think my mother loves you."

"John"—the lawyer leaned forward. Tremaine smiled at him.

"That's your agreeable opportunity, Sam. Find out for yourself. Discover your own gold. It's there."

"You have lost your mind, sir!"

"Well," said John, "that may be; but you will find your happiness."

The lawyer took out his handkerchief and wiped his glasses, put them on nervously, and stared at Mrs. Tremaine's son.

"I leave her with you, Sam—a sacred trust. I have told Nolan to pack my things; I leave Virginia on Saturday. I leave as I left before—I'm going to run away. I don't wish my mother to know. I could not

take from her—I think it will cost her to part from me.—I leave her in your care.”

Leavitt was silent. Now that John had opened all the doors upon his kingdom and had daringly told him what he thought about his mother’s feelings, he was too moved to speak for a moment. When he did so, he said with old-fashioned dignity :

“No man can give a woman to another, sir. Things would be easily arranged if that were possible. From here I have watched over Molly. If you really desert Virginia, I’ll watch over her still.—You’re not going to marry Julia ?”

“No,” said Tremaine.

“I think,” said Leavitt, “you know what my feelings are toward you, John. Whatever my judgments may have been ——”

Tremaine interrupted harshly : “We do ourselves too much honor, my dear friend, in thinking ourselves fit to judge. The only Man Whose example we were taught to follow said : ‘I judge no man.’”

“You cut the ground from under me, John.”

“He wrote on the ground,” said John quickly. “Remember that.”

Leavitt continued thoughtfully : “It’s a cruel thing that no matter what we do with our future, our past leaves such an irrevocable mark.”

John shrugged. “Neither the past nor the future interests me very much,” he said. “I have always found that I had a handful with the present hour.”

“Brandegee was here last night,” said Leavitt

irrelevantly. "He sat where you sit. He spoke of you ——"

Tremaine raised his eyebrows ; his cool indifference did not encourage the lawyer. Leavitt went on :

"—— With admiration and respect—as they all do, my dear fellow. He said," continued Leavitt, "that he wished he had a daughter. He would be proud to have you for his son."

John laughed harshly. "Malvern wouldn't agree with him."

"John," said the lawyer, leaning forward and putting his hand on John's knee, "I'm afraid when you go away this time that you will just about break that little girl's heart. When you renounced election, I saw your mettle. I understood what sort of a man you were. I knew that you would be absolutely honorable in your relations with Isobel."

Tremaine drew back. His eyes blazed.

"You mean to say, Sam, that you don't consider me fit to marry Malvern's daughter?"

"Don't think I undervalue you, John. I know the man you are."

John threw back his head and laughed aloud, and exclaimed :

"Know me! The devil you know me! But you shall! You have seen me renounce distinctions, position, publicity. Now you, with my mother, with Julia, with all of them, want me to make the final sacrifice—give up the woman I love—dash down the cup of life like a sick man, like a fool and a coward. I be-

lieve I'm that now. I tell you ——" he paused. Leavitt's hand was again upon his knee, and the older man's face approached nearer his.

"There has never been a stain on the Malvern name," he said. "You could not marry her without telling her the truth. Her father knows. You will complicate her life."

There was no change of expression on Tremaine's face. It was set and dark. Leavitt at that moment caught a sound which had escaped the younger man; he heard the voice which was dearest to him of any in the world. He could not believe his ears, and said to John:

"Listen! It isn't possible! Can it be Molly's voice?"

He sprang up and hurried to the door, but before he could open it, the thing happened which he had dreamed all his life would some day happen and which had never happened: Mrs. Tremaine came alone into the room, smiling.

"John, Sam, I just ran over"—and she spoke like a girl who has lightly crossed the street to greet a friend; she spoke as though she had been in the habit of "running over"—"I just ran over to bring John an important message."

She held a telegram in her hand. Over her dress of a dark color she wore a long silk coat—her son's last gift to her—a pretty garment which suited her well. The furry edge of her small hat lost itself in her gray-brown hair. There was a flush of excitement in her face caused by this unwonted excursion. John was struck by his mother's beauty and her youth.

"They said it was important," said his mother.

John opened the despatch, read it, looked at it gravely, and put it in his pocket. Her eyes were on him.

"It's no bad news, John?"

Her son laughed shortly. "Bad news," he said curtly, "only comes to a man who has close ties, you know. My only tie is you, and you seem to be in the most perfect health."

"Is it bad news?" she repeated.

"It's a telegram from Africa, relating to business. Nothing to interest a woman."

"John, I haven't seen you since dinner. You were not in all night."

He saw only anxiety in her face and tenderness. He knew she would not question him.

"Did Nolan bring all you wanted to the cabin?"

"Yes."

She was used to his curt, rude speech. It meant nothing to her now. She understood him better than Leavitt did; she understood well something of what he was passing through.

"Molly," said the lawyer, "whatever the news was you brought John, I am glad it brought you. I want you to see the view from this window of the river and of Riverside." He went over to the window and drew the curtains back. How often he had looked with longing at this view, which now was transfigured because she stood by his side and shared it with him. The window was deep, the two passed within the shel-

ter of the dark curtains. In the distance Mrs. Tremaine could see the gables of her house. Between its red banks the river flowed brown and swift. Leavitt pointed out to her the features of the landscape in a voice that meant other things than the platitudes of his words.

Tremaine took out the telegram and re-read it. It was just the imperative summons from his mining interests in South Africa that would call him back. It had come now like the voice of destiny. He stood there a moment thinking, his expression softening as he looked toward the window; then he picked up his hat and gloves and stick and went quietly from the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MRS. TREMAINE, when she returned, wandered into her own house like some one walking in a dream. Her son, who was sitting over his papers, writing in the library, looked up as she came leisurely into the room. She smiled at him vaguely, sweetly, an exquisite expression on her face—a subdued happiness, a look between tears and joy. John, unobserved, for she was only half conscious that he was in the room, watched her draw off her long soft gloves, lay them together on the table, take off her hat slowly, put it by, and run her hand lightly over her hair, as though the graceful touch might charm away the gray that had dusted her with the powder of years! He watched her stand meditatively, one hand on her brow, her cheeks charmingly pink, her eyes humid. When she spoke, her voice was still warm with a late thrill.

“Davey,” she called him by his brother’s name, as though they were children, “tell Mammy to fetch some wood. It’s a little cold here.”

Then she saw him—big, full-grown, smiling at her—and nodded and laughed.

“John! Ring for some wood, will you?”

Tremaine felt sure that Leavitt had spoken—had made love to her this time, no doubt, with greater fervor than ever before, and that his mother’s youth

had come back to her with the wooing. He threw on some wood himself, drew up a little divan to the brightened fire, and when his mother had seated herself, he stood tall and dark before her, looking down as was his habit when he talked to her. Now that the first blush of her dream, her first agitation had passed, she was back in every-day life, still a little transfigured by her sentimental journey ; but her son now was too emphatically a part of her existence for her ever to be long unconscious of him.

"John, the despatch I fetched you over ? You wouldn't speak of it before Sam. I didn't urge you. I'm afraid it was bad news ?"

"On the contrary, excellent news."

"I am glad of that."

"I mean to say, it's a good thing to find that something interests you."

"You are not moderate, John, in anything."

"Well, perhaps not."

"Then it is business ?"

"Yes."

He saw that business could not interest Mrs. Tremaine at this moment. She leaned back in her chair, her head against the cushions, and her eyes wandered over to the window, through which she could not see Oaklands, and the dream was ready to return.

She heard her son say : "I think you are happy in Riverside, mother." And she gave him her attention with a start.

"I would be, perfectly, if ——"

He said tranquilly : " If it were not for me. That's always the trouble, isn't it ? "

" I could never be happy now," said his mother, " unless you were."

" Oh," he exclaimed, " no one's happiness should depend on another's ! It's not meant that way, and—more or less—we make our own lives."

His mother touched the divan at her side.

" Come and sit here, John."

He did so, and she took his hand.

" You have given me everything in the world."

" Except happiness, mother."

" You have given Julia and the children everything in the world."

" Oh," he said with a slight shrug. " Julia ! "

" You are wonderful."

He covered his mother's hand with his. " I'm wonderfully lonely."

She nodded. " I know, I know. And I've thought lately—I've hoped—Julia . . . "

" No," he said, so definitely that she hurried :

" Oh, well, perhaps not ; but I do want your happiness, my son."

He did not recall to her that now, however much she wanted it, there was nothing in her power to do for him ; that her power to do for him was passed ; that she had lost, with that lost boyhood, a woman's supreme chance. He did not recall this to her because he did not think it ; his nature was too generous. He was devoted to her in a chivalrous and tender way ; he

wanted to keep from her all pain and all touch of care. He said :

"Two years ago, when I first came home, I asked you to lend yourself to me, to remain with me in Virginia for a time. You accepted"—he saw her eyes widen.

"What do you mean? What are you saying, John?"

"Only recalling."

"You asked me to lend myself then, John; but I didn't know you then. I know you now."

He lightly patted the hand he held. "I am going to release you from your promise, mother. I have given you your home, and now I'm going to leave you free in it."

"John!"

"Mother," he said with rough directness, "I should like you to marry Leavitt."

She shook her head, but could not speak.

"I admire him," said John, "more than any one I ever knew—and he's such a faithful lover."

"Hush, hush!" Then, after a moment, "There's no one like you."

He exclaimed in great surprise: "Mother!"

"Why," she said with ardor, "you will never know how I have watched you during these two years."

He repeated these last words with a curious eagerness: "Watched me?"

She went on quickly. "At first your return was

agony to me. You know it. My heart was set against you, John. The stain —— ”

“ Mother ! ”

“ I watched your methods and your fidelity. Everywhere you were so powerful and so good ; and John, I used to say to myself sometimes : Can it be that he did that dreadful thing ? And John, when you touched my hand sometimes —— ” She stopped ; she could not go on.

“ My God ! ” she heard her son exclaim, and she hastened to say : “ But your past has been buried for a long time. It never can exist for me again.”

Her words were so eager, she was leaning toward him with much tenderness, that he said, looking at her with keen expectancy : “ You do believe in me ? ”

“ Absolutely.”

“ You mean that you believe that I am regenerated —that I am now an honest man ? ”

She said with determination : “ Yes, I believe you are completely purified and redeemed,” and she added bitterly : “ It’s a cruel thing that you should be shadowed by that past, my son.”

But in Tremaine’s heart, whatever work this moment might have wrought spiritually was over. Mrs. Tremaine felt the hand holding hers relax. He leaned back on the sofa and sighed.

“ Oh, there are harder things,” he said, in his old harsh voice.

She asked : “ What, pray ? What could be harder ? ”

“ Why,” he said, “ the search for faith. That’s the

hardest, most thankless task in the world. That eternal looking for a human heart that's full of faith. Why," he exclaimed, "I would relinquish all elections and political success, and all the coal and diamond mines in the world—if they were mine—to find faith like a grain of mustard seed."

"Oh," she cried, "why do you speak to me like that, John? You know I believe in you absolutely. I'd trust you with anything."

He bowed his head, as though he thanked her, and continued: "Why, lives are ruined by the lack of faith. Men and women are separated by it forever; and the whole progress of the world is hindered by the need of faith like a grain of mustard seed."

His mother leaned toward him; the tears were filling her eyes. She felt in this moment that, while she was so near him, his past still rose up between them like an invincible barrier.

"John," she murmured, "you have become to me dearer than anything else."

She heard him say: "David's memory?" She waited a moment with quivering lips, then said:

"You've given me everything I have. There is no longer any distinction in my heart between my sons. I want you to stay. Take the nomination they offer you. Tell Isobel you love her. Let them say what they like!"

His face was unmoved. Everything she said only put him more definitely in a class apart.

"Why," he said, "you don't know what you sug-

gest. If my name were brought up for public office and that old scandal appeared, it would break your heart. You know it."

She wiped away her tears and said tremulously: "Oh, I don't know anything about that. I only know that it would break my heart to lose you."

Brandegge wrote John a letter enclosing a petition, signed by the prominent men of the district, urging him to accept the nomination. He was reading this, turning it over in his hands, both satisfaction and bitterness in his feelings, when the door from the hallway opened, and Isobel Malvern came into the living-room in her riding-dress. It seemed as though she had expected to find him alone. She came forward, holding out her hand more like a boyish comrade than a young girl, and her bright gaiety at this moment, her disassociation from everything here that combined to trouble him, made her specially charming to him.

"I've come," she said brightly, "from riding up and down the country, and I wanted especially to see you about it. I've been to Craig's Corners; I've been all along the river during the past few days."

"Are you breaking in a horse?" he asked, "or trying to tire out some too persistent idea? That's the way I ride when I want to get rid of something."

"I've been canvassing," she nodded. "I've been prospecting in the political field. Father thinks he's supporting Mr. Wallis, and I've been informing myself. Do you know?"—she smiled—"he doesn't stand a

chance ; and do you realize how popular you are, and how they're fairly calling to you ? ”

“ I don't think anything about it,” he said ungraciously, “ since I've decided not to accept the nomination.”

“ Oh,” she persisted, “ that's just what I've come to see you about.”

“ You ? ” he repeated.

“ Yes,” she said. “ You are the most important man in Virginia, and they say that you are too indifferent, too cold-blooded a Southerner to work for your State.”

They had been standing. He gave her a chair, took his own, and said, still ungraciously :

“ Among the different opinions of me, they haven't expressed the right one. I'm a nomad, a wanderer. I am tired of Virginia. It bores me.”

He put his fingers together and looked at her with cruel indifference. Things were closing in. Just a last good run to the finish ! He would be gone this week, and there would be thousands of miles between them ; she would bear it and forget. As far as he was concerned, nothing made any difference.

In this girl, Tremaine had met his match. She was not a soft little thing, to be brushed aside, even moulded. Nature had given her a steadfast spirit, and nothing would change her. She would mature and strengthen, but life would not weaken her. His response now did not even change the color in her face.

“ Craig's Corners,” she said practically, “ are for you

to a man. They want no one else. You see, I used to work among those people quite a little before I went to Europe, and I know them. So I heard a bit of politics and gossip, and it seems they are going to march to Riverside before long in a big deputation."

"Rot!" he said impolitely. "They will waste their time."

"It will probably be a very rustic mob," she continued. "They'll gather, as they march along, from the river towns."

She leaned a little across the table to him; her eyes were as clear as pools, half laughing, and back of their good-fellowship, the charming suggestion of a deeper tenderness—just waiting.

"Let them march!" said John.

"Oh, they'll march," she repeated gaily; "and I'm not sure that the big men in Richmond—Mr. Brandegee and lots of others—are not going to draw up some kind of paper and present it to you."

He reached over to the box on his table, took a cigarette, and lit it.

"They will waste their time."

"Well," she accepted patiently, "it's in a good cause; and do you know, I'm not so sure."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I think you'll run," she said with a certain conviction; "I believe you'll be in Congress."

"I shall probably be in South Africa," he said, "six weeks from to-day."

He might enjoy what satisfaction there was, for in

spite of herself her eyelids flickered, and he saw her exercise her fine control.

"And your mother?" she asked.

"She did very well without me for fifteen years," said Tremaine.

She murmured: "Now you are hard. You are a tyrant everywhere. There are better rôles."

She threw her head up rather defiantly, and he asked with something like a bitter mockery in his voice:

"Are you going to indicate them to me?"

She said boldly: "Why not? Sometimes a woman sees things better than a man does. Why should I not help you? Why should not a friend help you?"

He leaned very slightly toward her and said in a low voice: "There are reasons why you should not even try." And before she could reply to this, he added: "I have no friends. I am here to-day, gone to-morrow. When I was in South Africa, I longed for Virginia. Now it's a prison, and I long to get away."

He saw her whiten at length. He had been merciless. She gathered up her gloves and riding-crop from the table. She saw now that at all events Julia Tremaine was not in his life. Was he going back to something there—something that was at once a bond and a burden?

"You are your own worst enemy," she said slowly, as she rose. "Good-by. I said it once before in the meadows, and you did not go. Perhaps Virginia will keep you still. Perhaps you will find that you have friends here. I hope so. Good-by."

CHAPTER XXXV

DURING dinner at the Brandegees'—and it had been a long one to both of them—Julia and Isobel looked at each other with mingled feelings.

Julia, as she discussed John and the nomination with Brandeggee, talking with the assurance of one of the family, represented to Isobel the cause of all her unhappiness. She watched her, magnetized by Julia's grace and charm, and her heart contracted as she thought what this woman must mean in John Tremaine's life. Julia, in looking at Isobel, envied her youth. But it was not of Isobel that she thought as she sat there, battling with herself and fate.

This evening she had been brought to desperation. She could not renounce Tremaine, give up her hope of him. She could not!

Isobel, under the burden of being agreeable to the one woman she dreaded and disliked, was on her mettle, and Julia listened, leaning forward, her arms along her knees and drawing her gloves (which she had taken off) slowly through her fingers. Finally Isobel touched upon the coming election.

"I wish Mr. Tremaine would take the nomination. I hope he will. Mr. Brandeggee and the others will succeed in persuading him." She paused, the blood

beating into her cheeks, and turned to Julia quickly. "Don't you hope so?"

Her voice, her words, the pose and turn of her head, the flutter of her hand as she arranged the lace on her dress, confessed her feelings.

"Take the nomination? John?" Julia said. "I don't think I do wish it. He is quite right in refusing."

Isobel exclaimed: "How can you say so? What a pity not to urge him at Riverside!" And she thought: "She wants him to leave Virginia, to go to South Africa—she wants to go with him!"

She could say no more, and Julia, impelled by jealousy and by her determination if possible to sweep away every obstacle between herself and John, took a decision which, in her calmer moments, she would have thought herself incapable of taking.

Isobel had been placed at dinner next to the man from the North to whom she was reported engaged. He was evidently devoted to her. Perhaps even this evening there might be a culmination in Isobel's sentimental problem—*if she knew!* She forced herself to say tranquilly:

"Under the circumstances, nothing could be more unwise than for John to enter into public life."

Isobel echoed: "Under the circumstances?" vaguely wondering what such circumstances could be.

And Julia, turning her head for one brief moment toward the dining-room and seeing that the guests still sat there in the smoke of their cigars, waited a second

and then leaned forward to Isobel and impulsively put her hand on the younger woman's knee.

"John could not take the nomination, for his mother's sake—for all our sakes ——"

She felt the girl withdraw from her, even as she spoke, and heard her say :

"I don't understand. What do you mean?"

In her jealous obsession Julia gave no thought to the feelings of the girl before her. As far as she was herself concerned, too much was at stake—everything was at stake. She remembered afterward Isobel's face: the intensity of its young interest, its pure, uplifted look, its eagerness, its youth, and wondered where she had found the courage, the heartlessness, to try to wreck a faith like Isobel's.

"I mean," she said, speaking quickly, glancing once more back over her shoulder at the door as she heard the sound of a chair drawn across the hardwood floor; "I mean that there is something in John's life which will not bear the light—which a political campaign might bring to light."

She saw the girl stiffen and whiten and was quick enough to understand that the only thing a woman in love dreaded was the question of another woman. She forced herself to calm, though her heart was beating wildly. Each word was beaten from her by a force that, though she did not wish to resist it, she despised. She went on :

"I am not telling you this because of the nomination, but for another reason. Believe me, I want to tell you—I must tell you—because ——"

But the girl now arose quickly to her feet and stood close to Julia, who remained seated, looking up at her, her arms along her knees.

Julia was right. Isobel thought of another woman. It was bewildering to be spoken to like this by Julia ; but there was in the girl's heart one feeling stirring—her interest in the vital question of Tremaine's reputation.

She stood quite calmly, seeming to have very wonderfully regained her composure.

"Don't tell me," she said in a low tone. "I don't want to hear."

Julia did not move. She looked up at Isobel. The guests in the dining-room were moving. They had risen, still talking, and the clink of glasses mingled with their voices. Brandegge had poured out a last glass of port ; they were drinking a toast—both Isobel and Julia heard it, in Brandegge's voice : "John Tremaine !" They were to urge him to take the nomination —

Julia rose quickly ; she stood by Isobel's side.

"It's terrible, but it's past—seventeen years ago. In a moment of weakness—I don't know why—we none of us know why—no one has ever spoken of it—John appropriated funds that were not his own."

Isobel drew back from her, the color flashing into her cheeks ; her clear eyes darkened.

"You mean to tell me," she said, "that John Tremaine is a thief ?"

Julia contracted her brows. "He took ten thousand

dollars belonging to the Redlands National Bank—he ran away with the money. I want to tell you,” she went on, with every word finding speech more difficult, no longer very clear in her mind or in her sentences, knowing only that she must finish—that she would give worlds to have unsaid her words, but that she must finish, “I want to tell you that I care for him—absolutely! That it is nothing to me what he has done—nothing! That I will stand by him—that I care——”

Isobel seemed not to hear the last passionate disturbed confession. She was laughing—laughing at Julia in derision. Then there came into her face a new light—a light of hope and joy—for it had occurred to her that this was the explanation of his strange demeanor toward her and that, after all, he cared for her.

At that moment Brandegee with the other men came in from the dining-room. Isobel laughed again and said to Julia: “Surely you don’t expect me to believe that! You can’t believe it yourself, do you? Nobody could believe it.”

Before the beautiful simplicity of the girl’s nature, Julia seemed to herself a miserable thing. Isobel seemed so bright, so shining. She murmured:

“Forget what I have said.”

But Isobel, turning to Mr. Brandegee, who was coming toward her, said over her shoulder triumphantly:

“I never heard anything so ridiculous!”

CHAPTER XXXVI

MALVERN of late was anxious and troubled. His newly-acquired fortune had been blinding him to many things. He suddenly awakened anew to possible danger that Isobel might care for John; for the news had been brought him that Isobel was riding up and down the district, interesting herself in the coming election. On this afternoon, when she returned from Richmond, she found him walking up and down the library, smoking, meditating, and thinking of her with anxiety.

Although they had been much alone together, and their life had been intimate and close, he had left her—as Southern girls are left—very free, enjoying her, loving her, and never directing her in the least degree. With the indolence of the Southerner, he put aside disagreeable probabilities, procrastinated before questions of expediency, and even now, when he was really troubled and annoyed, could hardly bring himself to ask Isobel direct questions or to impose upon her any injunctions that would hamper her freedom.

Whenever he heard the name of John Tremaine, it awakened in him a curious mixture of feelings—disapproval, irritation, and reluctant admiration. On several occasions lately he had been obliged to see him in Richmond, where they were both engaged in affairs that

necessitated their meeting; and he had been forced to extend to this man, whom he believed to be a moral weakling but to whom he felt in honor bound to be decent for his mother's sake, a certain respect and confidence; for everything the man did bore a stamp which men are quick to recognize. Malvern knew he would have liked John enormously had he been able to respect him, and he was too much of a man himself not to recognize in this other man the qualities of success. And now that he was rich again, he could regard John without the acridness of the jealous poor.

He was thinking of the dual impression Tremaine made upon him, admitting his charm, and that he might easily be dangerous to a woman, when his daughter entered.

"Isobel," he said, "I've got the plans here for the new greenhouses. Will you sit down and look them over with me?"

He went to the table where he had been studying them and spread them out. He asked her, as she leaned absently looking down upon the glazed bits of paper, something about her Richmond visit and the Brandegees, and she answered him absently. Malvern took her excessive pallor for fatigue, supposing that she had kept late hours; but it was not natural to his daughter's youth and healthy poise that her hand should tremble. He saw in a few moments, as she touched without any apparent attention the architect's drawings, that she was not interested; but he did not

know that she was saying to herself: "All this contrived and conceived with John Tremaine's money!"

"What did Brandegee say about the nomination?" he asked, rolling up, as he spoke, the plans of the greenhouses and putting an elastic band around them. He saw that he had not her attention, and he was sorry as he asked the question that he had done so, because he knew that Brandegee was strong for Tremaine.

Isobel stood leaning against the table. In her pretty spring dress and hat, girlish and slender, she made her father think of her mother.

"He is very enthusiastic," said the girl, "very earnest, and he's going to move heaven and earth in order to change Mr. Tremaine's determination."

She looked at her father and smiled.

"Poor Daddy!" she said; "I'm afraid, if Mr. Brandegee succeeds, your Tom Wallis will be a very poor second."

"Nonsense!" said her father sharply. "Wallis is a fine fellow. He's got the strongest politicians in the State at his back. Tremaine wouldn't stand a chance."

"I think he would," said Isobel quietly, and abruptly, swiftly, turning to her father as though she had just thought of the question, she asked him: "Why doesn't Mr. Tremaine run?" She waited a minute and added: "Do you know?" Her clear eyes were on him frankly.

The question was a great surprise. As she asked it, Malvern remembered his given word—his honorable

promise to a woman of whom he was sincerely fond, a woman whom his innate chivalry led him to endeavor to protect. But he thought at the same time: "If Isobel knew—if I could tell her—it would solve the problem. If she has an infatuation for Tremaine, this would kill it." And watching her, seeing her color rise and fall even as she spoke, he said to himself: "By Jove, I believe the girl cares for him!"

The distaste with which he had regarded any alliance with John Tremaine was strong now, and the fact that his daughter's life might be shadowed even for a short time by this impossible affection made him all father and very little Mrs. Tremaine's friend.

"There are many reasons why a man should refuse to enter a political campaign," said Mr. Malvern shortly.

"But why, in his case?" said his daughter. "He is ambitious, a true Virginian, and he must know that it's only a stepping-stone to what any man like him would be glad to reach." And she repeated, her eyes eagerly watching her father's expression: "Why does he refuse? Do you know?"

Between the interval of the night before and her seeing her father, she had thought of nothing else than his dislike of their neighbor, his hatred; and she was wishing with all her heart that she might be mistaken, that she might find that her father was ignorant of the story.

"Father," she said simply, moving toward him and putting out her hand, which she laid upon his arm,

"last night, at the Brandegees', Mrs. David Tremaine told me a perfectly ridiculous story—a preposterous story—and I want to hear you say that you don't believe what she told me—that you know it to be untrue, as I do—as every one who knows Mr. Tremaine must know."

The girl saw her father's face grow hard, and in his mind the promise to his old friend no longer held. He felt that he must now tell the truth to his daughter who, as he believed, was unfortunately attached to a man whose moral weakness put him out of the question as a possible husband.

She continued: "I can't, of course, place any faith in the story of a woman whose only part in Mr. Tremaine's life was one of disloyalty. But from the frankness with which she spoke, and the fact that she asked me to speak to you about it, I can't help thinking that perhaps this dreadful lie ——"

Mr. Malvern broke in upon her. "I don't know what you have heard," he said briefly; "I am surprised that she should have told you anything. As far as I am concerned, I have given my word to his mother ——"

He saw the girl recoil; her hand dropped from her father's arm. She repeated the words: "His mother!" and then she exclaimed: "Oh, how horrible! But you don't mean to tell me that his mother believes this, too?"

Mr. Malvern saw nothing beautiful in his daughter's faith. With every word, with every expression of

her face now, she confessed to him that she loved Tremaine.

"Sit down," he said, speaking more sternly than he had ever spoken to her.

He rushed up a chair and half led her to it, and she sat down and faced him, while he remained standing in front of her.

There rose up in Mr. Malvern at this moment a species of insane fury against this man who had taken his daughter's affections, who had been able to awaken in her such colossal faith. He saw himself powerless before her strength of belief—that unwavering belief which in the heart of those who truly love lifts the object high, holds it there, and knows it to be sublime. But Malvern did not realize for a single moment how puny his effort, or any other effort, would be against this girl's love.

"What difference does it make to you, Isobel," he asked in the same voice, "what Tremaine's past has been—what he is? Has he asked you to marry him?"

Now he saw her blush cruelly, and he could not know the pain his words gave her.

"No," she answered with an effort. "Not only has he never asked me to marry him, but no word of anything of that kind has ever passed between us. If it will make you less dreadful to him," she went on, emphasizing the word and lifting her head, "please let me assure you that I am nothing to Mr. Tremaine."

Her father knew her mettle and also her honor, and believed that what she said she thought to be true.

"I am glad of that," he said sincerely ; "for it would be a most unfortunate thing if you cared for him—if he had cared for you."

He paused for a moment, looking at her, and knew that she did care. But the reserve that existed between them made it hard for him to proceed. Yet the fact that, as she told him, John did not care for her touched his pride for her. She would not be likely to confess that she loved a man to whom she was nothing.

"He has the charm," he said, "of all successful men, of men of action and power. He has the charm of wealth. It very often happens that brilliant qualities are combined in those persons whose moral fiber is not quite as fine as it should be."

The girl was leaning forward in the chair her father had made her take. She sat looking up at him and said now, with the same challenge with which she had spoken to Mrs. David Tremaine, the same incredulity, the same strength of belief :

"Do you mean to tell me, father, that you believe that Mr. Tremaine was a thief ?"

Mr. Malvern drew a breath of relief and was a little shocked as well. She knew, then ! He was spared the fact of breaking his word.

"I admit," he said practically, "that the thing sounds preposterous, my dear, just as you said it did."

Malvern lifted the lid of the cigar-box, took out a cigar, lit it, and took one or two puffs.

"When you see him," he said, "and talk with him, and realize the magnificent position he has made, the

fortune he has amassed ; when you see the Tremaine of to-day, it is very hard to connect him with the morbid boy who ran away from Virginia under a cloud."

"Morbid," said the girl hotly, "perhaps. Melancholy, perhaps. Misunderstood—even disliked ; cruelly treated by the girl he loved. All that, father, all that ! Wild, perhaps, too ; reserved and unhappy ; but a thief —— !"

She rose from her chair, as she had risen from the sofa the night before. Her hands were cold ; she clasped them together and stood defiantly before her father.

"Then you believe this miserable story, too ? What a poor judge of human nature you must be ! How can you ? How dreadful !—How could he ever come back here among you all ?—What strength it shows ! What nobility, what character ! To come back and generously, lavishly, help those who misjudge and condemn him, who think him vile ! Why," she cried, "it is superb !—I don't know why he's done it—perhaps we shall never know—but he is superb."

The color was hot in her cheeks now, and her eyes flashing. Between her father and herself were immeasurable miles.

Impressed as he was by her beauty and her ardor, there was nothing in her father's heart toward her but dread and displeasure.

"Isobel," he said coldly, "remember you are speaking of a man who, as you say, does not care for you. You are championing a man to whom you are indif-

ferent. You are standing up against your father and his people for a ——”

“Stop!” she said, and moved toward the door. “Oh, I won’t hear another word! It’s dreadful!” And she thought in a swift rush that the bread they ate, that their roof-tree, was paid for by the money of this man. The tears were hot under her eyelids; her whole soul was going out in tenderness to Tremaine. She could not remain another moment in her father’s presence without telling him whose debtor he was. It was on her lips to do so. She started to speak, then, controlling herself, hastily left the room.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THAT day, John busied himself with his affairs at the mines until late in the evening. The wrench of leaving Virginia would be a cruel one. He could no longer comfort himself with any picture of home ; that was over. He now understood how much he had built on his ultimate return—this coming back to his own. He also knew how, in spite of himself, he had counted on some fate that would solve for him the problem of his life, here at home. Musing as he sat there solitary by his table, he thought how futile is the turning of the human mind toward Fate as a solver of problems. If he himself could not untangle the knot, no outer power could do it for him.

He looked back and realized that his running away seventeen years before had put the seal on his life. He should have remained to face the situation then and there, or he never should have come back to Virginia. In any event, he should have returned to South Africa as soon as he had provided for his mother, and he could have done that in a month. Instead, he had weakly allowed his love for Isobel, his affection for home and his interest in the development of the country to hold him for nearly two years and to involve him in a situation which must result in unhappiness to himself and to those he cared for most.

He mused. Was it cowardly to go away now leaving behind him a woman whom he loved and who, as he felt, loved him?

In talking with Leavitt, he had said: "You ask me, like a sick man, to throw down the cup of happiness. I will not do it." He had determined then to tell Isobel that he loved her.

He could not see her again. If he did, he knew that he could not be master of his feelings.

Julia was still in Richmond. If he could only avoid bidding her good-by! . . .

He took a grim satisfaction in the fact that Malvern feasted on his bounty—not perhaps a very worthy triumph, but still something.

"Sam will eventually comfort my mother," he thought, and the idea of these two lovers was the only consolation he had.

Without, through his window, he could see the clear night and the stars. Soon there would be nightingales in the woods, but he would be on the veldt, again considering mining problems and questions of finance; again mingling in the crowd of men whose only interests were material.

He sat brooding, his arm upon the table, and Virginia, home, and country, became epitomized to him in the sweet figure of a young girl. He thought for a few moments, then half started up, his arm on the chair.

"Jove!" he said aloud; "I'll find her and tell her."

There was the sound of a hand on his door latch; some one knocked quickly. He called: "Come in!"

and the door was opened, admitting the fragrant, balmy air of the night and with it Isobel Malvern.

The surprise was so great that he simply stood as he rose, looking at her with eagerness and delight, the warmth of his feelings flushing his tone and his face.

"You!" he exclaimed. "You!"

She wore her simple tramping clothes and a little cap on her blond hair. She had seemed to him the spirit of the sunlight; now she seemed to him the very spirit of the night. She came up to him quickly.

"Yes, I've come from Malvern. No one knows I've left the house. I've something very important to say to you."

Looking down at her, Tremaine began:

"I have something very important to say to you."

Isobel had waited long for this moment, and now that it had come, curiously enough it was she who overrode his speech. She half lifted her hand, as though to prevent him, and said:

"Have you? Have you? Well, wait just a moment. I've something to say to you. You said, the last time we were together, that we were not even friends. I don't wonder you think it."

"You don't?"

"Of course you feel it of all of us—of all of us."

Her chin was held well up, her fearless gray eyes were bent upon him with the spirit of courage and boldness he so liked in her.

"You must take back the fortune you gave my father."

"No; impossible!"

"We must never touch another penny of that money."

"Why, pray?"

"It was generous of you, noble of you, great of you; but you must take it back. I would rather see him poor; I would rather see him run the risk of anything you prophesy, than see him use your money."

He recoiled for a moment, suddenly struck by what might be the meaning of her words; and then he realized what it would mean to him, in that moment, to have her know the stain upon his name, to have her believe anything of him but good. It seemed as though he could not bear it. But even before this anguish could find a place in his heart, Isobel, drawing nearer, had put out her hand with a charming gesture that had in it something of humility.

"I have come to ask you to forgive my father—to forgive them all."

"To forgive?" he questioned, experiencing a sudden revulsion at her gesture and her words.

Her voice was peculiarly sweet and thrilling as she said:

"Oh, I know, I know!"

"You know? You know what?"

She was looking at him earnestly, the expression of her face inspiring, encouraging. The tenderness in her heart had not yet put out that light that sometimes is quenched by more personal feelings. The look of her, her expression, the tone of her voice, made him say to himself: "Why, it's worth it all to see such a look!"

"What do you know?"

"Why, what does it matter?"

"What does it matter!" he exclaimed, mystified.

"Do you think I believe it?"

She had drawn nearer to him, still nearer.

"You must forgive my father," she said quietly; "he is jealous and prejudiced, and he doesn't know you. And your mother—you must forgive her."

She was silent, looking at him, and he knew that she was waiting for him to speak. She paused long, looking at him with the same bright look.

As Julia Tremaine had done, but in such a different way, she put her hand on his arm. He heard her say under her breath:

"Oh, John Tremaine, I know."

Tremaine caught her hand between his almost brutally.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you could love a thief?"

She held her head up, looking at him firmly.

"No," she said, "never!"

"Women have loved lower than that," said John.

"Possibly," she answered; "but the man I love has never been a thief." Then she added, the same bright look still unquenched: "I would not believe it of you if you told me so with your own lips."

For a moment they stood like this together, Tremaine looking down into her face, drinking thirstily from the light and faith and love there; and then, as though his own hand, his own look, quenched the beautiful light, he saw her expression change. She

was transformed from the gracious emissary into simply a woman. Her eyes filled with tears, her lip began to tremble. She heard him say under his breath something about a "grain of mustard seed" and wondered afterwards what he meant. She thought that he would take her in his arms. She had no longer any doubt that he loved her.

He took both her hands in his and crushed them hard, allowing himself this much of her. He spoke quickly, in an undertone:

"We've only a few seconds to be here alone together like this," he said. "Some of my employees are coming to talk with me. They may be here at any moment, and they must not find you here. You must go at once."

Even as he spoke, he was leading her to the door.

"I can't thank you for coming. Thanks are poor things in return for what you have said. Believe me, I would rather have this evidence of your faith in me than anything in the whole world. Bless you!" he said fervently, close to her and yet not touching her. "Bless you!"

With her eyes fastened upon his face, it seemed as though she called upon him to speak out his heart to her.

"I love you," he said. "I could not have gone without telling you so, though I can never ask you to be my wife. Your faith will sustain me till I die. Good-by."

With a protest on her lips, she lifted her face to him.

He heard his name called under the window :

"John, John ! Are you there ?"

And Sam Leavitt, tapping on the pane, passed around to the door. John threw it open. As Leavitt entered, he said :

"Miss Malvern has been here a few minutes to talk with me about a matter of importance."

Leavitt stood in the doorway. He looked from one to the other and would have withdrawn, but John said :

"Will you see Miss Malvern home and come back here for me ? I am expecting the superintendent of the mines. We'll walk back later to Riverside."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

JULIA'S return to Riverside was a flight. She could not get back fast enough—could not get to John quickly enough, before any one else should see him—before he could hear of her treachery from Isobel.

She had stayed all that night at Richmond and not slept an hour of the time; and in her wakefulness, full of longing, desire, and unhappiness, she had—so she thought—gone far to pay for the wrong she had done him. She took back with her to Riverside the fire and excitement of her anxiety, and a determination not yet dead. She wondered where she should find John—prayed that she might find him alone—met her children in the hall and scarcely spoke to them.

“Where is your Uncle John?”

Mrs. Tremaine called to her from the library, but she did not answer.

Learning that he had gone down to the mines, she started out, as she was, to walk across the fields and the Back Pasture into the woods, to take the short cut to the settlement. She crossed the Back Pasture, where the earth was hard and crumbling under the light frost of the previous night, and walked swiftly into the fragrant woods, almost stumbling with fatigue and excitement.

Her feelings had now reached such a pitch that it

seemed to her that they must carry John with them ; it was impossible for her to believe that she could feel like this and he remain so indifferent. She was not clear in her mind what she would say to him ; she had no plan, but she knew what she wanted, and she was putting forth the supremest effort that a woman can make.

There were sobs in her throat, which she forced back. She breathed heavily, as one who carries a burden ; her lips were dry with the fever of the night ; she held her furs closely about her. Her eyes were bent on the ground, but when she heard in the distance the crackling of twigs and looked up and saw John coming toward her, she stood still, and her heart beat so fast that she swayed where she stood, and her hands holding her furs seemed to hold her heart in her breast. The film across her eyes prevented her clearly seeing his face or the unmistakable look on it of indifference—almost annoyance. She was still too carried away by herself to measure the other's feelings.

"I thought you intended to remain in Richmond until to-morrow?"

"I did intend to, but I had to come back."

She would have fallen without a support. She put out her hand gropingly and caught his arm and held to it convulsively, lifting her face to him in utter disregard of the work that sleeplessness and passion had wrought upon it.

"Marry me, John! Take me back with you!"

"No."

"Think what I could be to you! Let me prove ——"

The words would have died in her throat, but her desperation forced them out.

"I want to give my life, myself, to make up—to buy back ——"

He had been engrossed with his own problems, in the renunciation he was making here and in the future he was planning for himself of loneliness and disassociation from every tie; for though he had suffered, he had become impersonal, and had been carried out of his material self by his sacrifice. He looked at her almost benignantly. She seemed very pitiful to him. Both her hands were on his arm, and he covered them with his own strong hands.

"Be quiet. Calm yourself, Julia."

"I can't bear to think of your going back there alone!"

"Don't think of it."

His voice was so grave and so controlled, his look was so serene—for she could not stir him in any possible way now—that it penetrated her excitement as nothing else could have done.

"Why won't you marry me, John?"

"Because I love another woman."

"She can't be anything to you."

"I know that."

He felt her tremble. Tears rushed to her eyes and poured down her cheeks. He took out his handkerchief, and she buried her face in it. It was fresh and cool—and his. He heard her murmur:

"Do you really love her?"

And he said: "Yes, absolutely."

She leaned against him without reserve, her face buried against his breast. After a few moments she controlled herself and said, more tranquilly:

"Then there's nothing for me?"

"There's nothing for either of us, Julia."

"And you will go back there alone?"

"Yes."

He saw it was not necessary for him to tell her to control herself further, for she did so, wiping away her tears. The fires of her feelings were quenched by them, as the inevitableness of what he said killed at last her hope.

She asked, with a deep sigh:

"When will you go?"

"Very soon. I don't know exactly, but very soon."

"I am going to keep this," she said, and thrust the handkerchief he had given her, wet with her tears, into the breast of her jacket, under her furs.

"I haven't been able to bring you anything, John."

"That's one of the tragedies of life, isn't it, Julia?"

And she said quickly: "You think I haven't—you think I can't."

She caught his hand again and pressed it for a moment against her cheek.

"But I can; I will! And some day you will remember how I loved you. Now, let me go home alone, please, will you? I want to be alone."

She dropped his hand and started quickly back in the path. He would have gone with her, and said :

“ You are not going to do anything foolish, Julia ? ”

She turned a composed face over her shoulder and forbade him to follow her.

“ No,” she said, “ not anything foolish—not anything foolish. I promise you that. Only what I should have done long ago—something very wise indeed.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

TREMAINE made his preparations for leaving Virginia immediately with the promptness and decision that marked everything he did, and by dawn of the following morning he stole out softly through the corridor of the silent house to the room where Nolan slept and wakened him. When the servant appeared, a little later, he found Tremaine smoking by the window, very much as he had stood the first night of his arrival in Virginia nearly two years before. His master's bag lay packed and strapped on the floor, and the room bore the evidences of a hurried departure.

"Shut the door," said Tremaine. "Carry down those things by the back way to the stables; get up the motor and take them down to the station. I am going North to-night. You will follow to-morrow with the rest of the kit."

"Shure," said the man respectfully, "you're never goin' to steal away, yer honor, like a thief in the night?"

His master made no response.

"It will break every heart in Virginia," whispered the Irishman in his rich, hoarse voice.

Tremaine half smiled. "I don't believe you want to go, Tom. Come, do as I say! And don't make a noise about it."

Nolan lifted the bag and softly left the room in his stocking feet, and John followed him down the stairs. He went into the living-room to wait until Nolan should have carried out his instructions.

The old room was pale in the half-light of the morning, and in the fireplace were the ashes of the last cedar logs before whose flames he had sat the preceding night with his mother and Leavitt, when they had come in from the cabin. He had told her nothing; he could not bid her good-by.

He had wound up his affairs and could leave them for others to enjoy. No outlook into the future interested him. His heart was heavy in his breast.

He looked with affection about the room, so transformed from the dilapidated old library into which he had come, a stranger, two years before. He could think with satisfaction of what he had done here. He was going away again, a wanderer; but this time he would leave on Virginia an ineffaceable mark. He had restored his family's prestige; he had made others wealthy; he had opened up the riches of the country; he had made himself respected and beloved. If there were any satisfaction in these things, he might take it. But, as he stood with bowed head, his hands behind his back, surrounded by his memories, he only felt himself solitary and once again an outcast.

He looked at his watch. It was half-past six. Shortly the house would be astir. He had told one of his chief men to meet him at the cabin at seven o'clock to receive his final directions. He must go. He

glanced about the room, and with a tightening of the heart strings, went out quickly, opening the front door softly and shutting it as softly. No one was astir in the early morning. Every footstep that took him away was a heavy one and he stopped to look back at the house from the end of the path. Everything was quiet and tranquil; the blinds were down, and the place was still under the spell of repose. He walked quickly on, forbidding himself to think or reflect, and in half an hour turned the key of his cabin door.

It was several hours later that, his business finished, he was on his way back to the house. He had a feeling, as he retraced his steps across the property back to the homestead, that a spell had been broken. It was as though a web that had been folding around him for years had suddenly loosened. He drew a freer breath; a weight seemed lifted from him. His purpose had not altered, nothing had occurred to change his plans, and he had before him the probability of a painful scene with his mother if she should by any chance happen to learn that he was going away.

Before he entered the grounds by the lower pasture, he stopped for a moment to look back toward the settlement and toward Malvern Hill—to look back at it for the last time.

As he looked toward the hill, Isobel came riding over its brow and, as if she also were scanning the country, drew rein and sat looking down over the two properties. He could see her fine silhouette against the sky as she sat well, fearless, erect. As he looked

at her now, there did not seem to be any real distance between them.

She had infused into him the courage that he had needed; and above all she loved him—above all, he loved her. He knew that if he should meet her again, he would not be able to go away from Virginia alone. He turned and went quickly on.

There was a serene beauty in the tranquil morning. On the trees was the leafy beginning of the early Southern spring; the vines over the gallery were faintly green. From the kitchen—for he went in by the rear of the house—he heard Chloe's soothing voice singing:

“Hard times, hard times
Come again no mo' . . .”

“Marse John, chile,” said the negress, as he went in, “yo'-all suttin'ly doan' git 'nuff sleep to harm a rabbit.”

He laughed.

“What makes you think so, Mammy?”

“Didn't Ah hyar yo' strompin' roun' dis yere mawnin' fo' sunrise? A pusson what libs on de 'magination like yo'-all needs a powerful lot of res', honey.”

He looked round her spotless kitchen and sat down at the table.

“You've got some hot coffee for me, Mammy, haven't you? Give me a cup of coffee, and I'll drink it here with you.”

"Lawd!" she exclaimed delightedly, "Ah shore will do dat berry ting."

As he sat there, the sense of rest continued to pervade him. He watched Chloe indolently, as she prepared with eager hands a cup of fragrant coffee and brought him a hot scone on a kitchen plate. She was queen now over a little domain, ruling with a rod of iron the new servants that the larger household demanded, and in herself combining a dozen offices. Leaning against the sink, a score of pigtails round her head, displaying her white teeth in excited pleasure, one of Mammy's kitchen-maids regarded with delight the visit of the master of the house. From without came the sounds from the poultry-yard, and far away, from the mining district, the subdued striking of the electric clock. It was eleven, and John had been out of the house, without food, for nearly five hours.

He drank his coffee and looked up at his old nurse and repeated her last word:

"Rest?" He looked about him. "It seems very restful here."

"Ah reckon," said the old negress, "dat dere ain't no res' outside of home. Honey," she continued, "yo' shore mus' tell your ole Mammy some day 'bout your trabels."

As she asked him this, beaming on him, he realized how near she was to him, how she had nursed him, how much of a mother she had been, and how little he had seen of her. Now he would shortly be setting out again, and she would mourn for him in a way that no

one could ever comfort. But nothing must disturb this exquisite, this extraordinary sense of rest that was invading him, and for which he had no explanation ! He felt a peace such as he had never felt in his life before.

He left the kitchen and in the living-room found his mother with Julia and the children, and he came in upon a quiet family picture. Mrs. Tremaine sat in the window with her sewing, and Julia, in a large chair, a boy perched on either arm, read aloud to her sons. As John came in from the dining-room, he heard her voice in *Oliver Twist*.

He stood for a moment before any one saw him, and when he greeted his mother, bent down and kissed her. She looked up at him with an expression of contentment and happiness. Julia, as she held out her hand and bade him "good morning," was pale, and he realized that he had not seen her since their parting in the woods, but the meeting with her in the little circle of the family was easier to bear than he had feared it would be.

"Uncle John," said Roger, "sit down and listen to mother read about Oliver asking for more."

"Go on," said Tremaine to Julia, "don't let me disturb the story."

She hesitated ; picked up her book.

Tremaine took a cigarette from a box on the table, lit it, and sat down out of range of Julia's eyes, but where he could watch them all. He would keep this picture many years in his mind's eye ! He listened to

the reading vaguely, watching the boys' faces and their graceful positions as they hung over their mother. Julia had left a decided mark upon his life, but all was now settled for him, and nothing could ever again disturb his peace.

Mrs. Tremaine moved her needle back and forth in her work.

As John had broken in upon the family gathering, so in a few minutes the door was opened quietly, and Leavitt came in. The picture before him struck him as it had John. He would not disturb it. He went over to Mrs. Tremaine, lifted her hand, kissed it, and they looked at each other. He nodded to John, smiled at Julia, took a chair, careful not to place himself out of range of Molly Tremaine's eyes.

Julia continued to read.

And the peace pervading Tremaine's spirit seemed, like an intangible atmosphere, to grow and gather in the room. Mrs. Tremaine sewing, at last surrounded by security and more happiness than she had ever known, felt an assurance of good and of safety. The presence of Leavitt near her added to her happiness, but it was of her son that she thought. She believed him regenerated—a victor over temptations, a man who out of weakness had created great strength. She was proud of him, she was grateful to him. She looked up at him as he sat there, meditative, smoking, unconscious of her mental and spiritual nearness to him. She was praying in her heart. It was some time since he had referred to a South African journey; she believed

it to be far away. She was at peace, as she had not been for days, and could not quite understand it, because she had been sensible of what his renunciation meant to him.

Leavitt's musings were very much like her own. He thought of John with admiration and affection. He could not imagine Riverside without him. He had come this morning to talk with him and would do so later. He was going to ask him to reconsider his determination, to plead with him to remain in Virginia, to give up his idea of wandering again. Leavitt had attended a big political meeting and he knew that a delegation was to come to Riverside to besiege John at his own doors. In Leavitt's mind, the idea of John's crime was nearly obliterated; it had always been difficult to connect it with him. Nothing in this man's career or point of view was in keeping with the weakness of a thief. Over and over again, Leavitt had said to himself: "Is it possible that he ever committed a crime?" Now, as the lawyer sat in the old room, looking with pleasure at the graceful figure of the woman he loved busied with her work, the sense of peace pervaded him as it did the others.

Julia's mind was not on her book or on the words she read. Since she had left Tremaine in the woods the day before, she had lived a dozen lives. To a woman of her temperament nothing was easy—not even the enjoyment of her pleasures. She had gone headlong into feeling and come out of it shaken to her profoundest depths. But she also did nothing by halves.

Passionate and desirous, she had thrown everything to the winds in her effort to win him ; and now that she saw she had lost, she was ready to renounce as completely as she had loved. And in the interval between leaving him yesterday and to-day, she had renounced, had taken a tremendous decision.

Her renunciation and her decision had brought to Julia peace also. She was a mother, and she loved her children. Their warm young bodies leaned against her ; Davey's arm was around her neck. There is always in the rôle of victim a mental satisfaction. Love is so morbid that it takes a questionable pleasure in suffering. She was suffering for John. It was right that she should. She had caused him misery. There would be a triumph in bleeding for her wrong.

As they sat so, Chloe came into the living-room, rustling in her stiff starched clothes in a state of high excitement, her breast heaving, her silver-rimmed spectacles perched high on her bandanna. She came directly up to John.

"Marse John, dat air fool Nolan done foteh down your trunks fom de attic. Ah shore cayn't do nodin' wid him." She gesticulated wildly with her black hand. "Come along, honey, an' stop him."

There was no answer. She bent forward, peering down at John, and her voice broke.

"Yo' ain't gwine 'way again, is yo' ? Is yo' ?"

John rose and took her by the arm.

"Mammy, you go back to the kitchen and bake me some cookies."

She stood her ground, looking up at him. She shook her head.

"No," she said, "Ah ain't gwine to do no cookin'!" and finished with subtle comprehension, speaking to him as though he were eight years old: "Honey, tell yer ole Mammy what's hurted yo'. Somebody's done make yo' feel bad."

He led her to the door, and as she went out, she said over her shoulder, sobbing: "Miss Molly, Marse Lebit, yo'-all ain't nebber gwine to let him go?"

The peace in the room was rudely broken. As John turned back from the door which he had opened for Mammy, he saw that his mother had risen from her chair and was coming toward him. Her work had dropped to the floor; the gold thimble, rolling across the parquet, rattled against the baseboard. He heard her say: "What does Mammy mean?" and came to her and took both her hands, looking down into a face on which in that moment he saw nothing but love for him.

"Mother," he said, "I wanted to run away again. I'm afraid it was a cowardly thing to do, but I didn't feel able to say good-by." He turned to Leavitt as if to ask his aid. "Sam?"

"You were going away like that?" she could hardly speak. "You were really going away again without a sign or a word?" He felt her cling to him. "Oh, John!"

He had known that it would be hard, but not so hard as this. He shrugged and, letting go his mother's

hands, made a gesture without speaking, in a sort of appeal to them, as though he said : " You see how it is. You must understand."

And Leavitt, as though he answered this unexpressed appeal, said sternly :

" There is nothing in Virginia too good for you. This is your legitimate place, John. We all feel it. You have made your name anew."

A faint smile touched Tremaine's lips. Julia had risen and taken her children from the room. Leavitt gently rose as though to follow her and leave the mother and son alone together, but Mrs. Tremaine turned to him and put her hand on his arm.

" Stay," she said. " Plead with him for me. He must not go."

Tremaine looked straight at his mother. " Don't weaken me," and he appealed to her pride in that moment. " I came back for your sake—in order to do what I have done."

He heard her murmur the word " Isobel," as though she invoked the girl. " Isobel ! "

He shook his head, still smiling gravely. He saw his mother put her hand to her eyes ; she half swayed. John led her over to the sofa and made her sit down.

She was sitting like this, her face buried in her hands, and he was standing by her, with the benignant look upon his face that characterized it whenever he looked at his mother, when Julia came back into the room quickly. She came directly up to Mrs. Tremaine, knelt down by her side, took away with a

gentle force the hands from her face, and looked at her intently.

"Don't!" she said. "Don't cry! He needn't go."

Mrs. Tremaine looked at her. She would have clung to any straw to save John now. She had thought of Isobel—this was Julia.

"Can you keep him?"

She brought her cheek close to that of the younger woman, grasping tightly her hands. For a moment both clung together; then Julia regained her self-possession.

"I can keep him, yes! But not in the way you mean."

She heard John say: "Julia!" harshly; but throughout what she said, she ignored him and ignored Leavitt. She spoke as one might speak to a child—tenderly, close to Mrs. Tremaine, half humbly.

"David took the money. When John met David at Richmond and decided never to return to Redlands, he handed the money to David to deliver it to the bank, and David used it. There, don't start back so! Don't listen to John—listen to me! David told me when he was dying. He gave me a letter he had written, telling the truth and exonerating John. I've got it here—you'll read it. It was for your sake I haven't told. It was for my boys' sake. Try to believe me!"

Mrs. Tremaine had drawn away from her and was looking at her steadily. Julia was now thinking not of John or herself, but only of the mother. She was a mother, and she thought she knew what the shock

would be to this woman, whose idol was her eldest son and who, no matter how she loved the younger, for years had held David's memory sacred above everything else in the world. In her embrace, and in her gentle touch, she was trying, as she talked, to make the shock less intense.

"There!" she said. "Try to bear it. I bore it of my husband, you know, and all the while I was loving John. And when I knew this, I loved him more.—You see, I've no shame about it—no shame!—I feel now that I should have told it long ago, and that I have done very wrong indeed."

Intense as the moment was for Julia Tremaine, big as it was in her life, shaking as she was with the importance of the fact she told, she was forgotten entirely—as much so as though she had not spoken in her low vibrating tones—as though her womanly hands, full of sympathy and tenderness, were not on those of the other woman. Mrs. Tremaine looked at her, listened, pushed her firmly aside, and got up from the sofa. John stood near her, looking at her with sympathy—almost pity.

"John, is it true? Is what Julia says true?"

He answered unwillingly: "Yes."

She showed none of the shock they had expected her to show at the shattering of her idol. Her mind was all on John.

"My son! How you have suffered." She took the hand she held and lifted it to her lips. "How you have suffered. Why didn't you tell me long ago? You

should have told me. No man should bear another's fault like this. You should have told me, John." She questioned him: "Why? Why didn't you tell me?"

He only smiled without speaking and she understood why. How could he have proved his innocence? There was no proof—the evidence was all against him. He could not even have asserted his innocence without charging his dead brother with the crime. If he had done so would she have believed him? Would she not have considered him a coward as well as a thief? There was nothing that he could have done but to submit to the wrong they had put upon him.

She broke down completely; the reserve and coldness of years was gone. She sank back on the sofa, and as John placed her there, she drew him down with her.

"Sit down," she said, "here, John." And when he had done so, she took his face between her hands, scanning it, looking at it intensely, her features working with great emotion.

"What sacrifice!" she said. "How dreadful! What courage! John! Can you ever forgive us—can you ever forgive me?"

She forgot every one in the room but the man at her side, given back to her—no, given to her for the first time; and she could freely love him and think of him and idolize him.

"Speak to me," she said. "No, don't speak! I can't bear it.—You won't go now? You'll never go?"

Oh, your lonely years! How can we make up to you? Who can make up to you?"

She touched his hair, his forehead, yearning over him. Then she saw the tears come to his eyes.

"My darling, my darling!" and she burst into tears and drew his head to her breast.

Leavitt and Julia, watching them, were profoundly moved.

After a few moments, Mrs. Tremaine drew away and dried her tears.

"Isobel!" she said. "Isobel will make you forget, as we can never do. And you can have your life, John."

Then she said to Leavitt: "Telephone at once to Malvern, Sam. I want to tell Redmond—I want him to know immediately. I want Isobel to know. Ask them both to come here."

Her hands were clasped in both her son's; a feverish color came into her cheeks; her tears had dried. She sat up proudly. She was very beautiful in her excitement and in her tenderness. She could think of nothing but John. Leavitt might well have been jealous of her absorption. She said bitterly to Julia:

"You should have told this long ago—long ago!"

And Julia, who was sitting on the arm of the big chair near the table, said quietly:

"I have sons, too."

John, whose eyes had scarcely left his mother's face, now looked over at Julia, where she sat, long and graceful, her arms clasped. She had tried to win him by

every intrigue; she had wanted him to think that she alone would stand by him in spite of the stain; she would have married him and kept her counsel. Would she? At all events, she had reinstated him. He owed it to her. He bowed his head to her, thanking her silently.

Leavitt came round in front of him and wrung his hand.

"I don't wonder they call you the 'Big Tremaine.' I don't mind telling you, though it comes too late and does no good, that I think you've made a great mistake. You ought to have let David bear his sin. I know you did it for her." He smiled at Mrs. Tremaine. "It was beautiful of you, John. You did it for his sons and his wife, I know. But it was a great mistake. However, I love you for it! And you belong to Virginia now. We'll tell the boys that you'll run for Congress. Now I'll go and telephone to Malvern House."

John had not spoken.

CHAPTER XL

SOME one came up the steps of the verandah and was welcomed in the hall by Leavitt on his way to the telephone. It was Malvern himself. He had ridden over hastily and carried his riding-crop and gloves in his hand. He was animated by the air of importance and interest in events that was usual to him now.

"Where is Tremaine, Leavitt? Shall I find him here? There's a very extraordinary state of affairs—a fusion of the parties! My candidate has withdrawn. I am placed in a most extraordinary position."

Leavitt opened the door for him into the living-room, and he came in upon the family group. He greeted Mrs. Tremaine, still absorbed in his errand, and Julia.

"I want to have a few words with you, Tremaine," he said. "The county and the district are demonstrating for you. There's a delegation coming through Redlands at this very moment. They'll be here directly. I spent yesterday in Richmond with Brandegee. You know his partisanship——"

John had risen from the sofa, where he sat by his mother's side. Mrs. Tremaine began: "Redmond——" but John raised his hand, and she waited. Malvern had observed nothing, in his absorption in his subject.

"They don't seem to take your 'no' for an answer,

Tremaine," said his neighbor, looking at him sternly. "Moreover, my candidate has withdrawn. Your popularity is extraordinary! Brandegee has asked me, as a personal favor, to insist upon your taking the nomination. I think I gave him no cause whatever to imagine my point of view. There'll be a delegation here of eight hundred people ——"

He did not ask Tremaine what he intended doing. They all heard the noise of cheering in the distance. The cries grew louder. People were filling the lower part of the grounds in front of the house. From where she stood in the window, Julia could see them surging in. There were banners, there were sticks and umbrellas with handkerchiefs tied on the end; there was a band playing *My Old Kentucky Home*. They were drawing nearer.

Malvern glanced from John to Mrs. Tremaine, who sat with uplifted face, her eyes fastened on her son with a look of adoration and eagerness. She was waiting for him to speak, since he had told her to be silent.

"Not only Brandegee," said Malvern, "but my daughter! My daughter has ridden the country round, canvassing for you—carrying your banner! She has put herself against my will. You have magnetized and ——" He stopped.

Mrs. Tremaine rose from the sofa and came over and stood by John, linking her arm through her son's. Her air of pride in him was beautiful, brilliant.

"Redmond, he's going to run for Congress."

Malvern waited.

"There's no reason why he should not run. We were going to telephone you to come over ——"

She stopped and realized that it was not easy to tell—that in clearing John she dragged another into the dust. And the fact that Julia's revelation brought to her—the fact that David was a traitor and a thief came upon her with all its weight of misery. In the moment of this rehabilitation of John, whose life had been a martyrdom and a sacrifice, her heart sank within her at the knowledge of what David had been. This gave her back a living son, but it robbed her forever of the dead.—She tried to speak; she could not, and she looked appealingly at John, the quiet of whose face was unbroken.

The people were thronging up the drive. There was a momentary lull in the cheering—a momentary lull in the music. They were waiting. Several members of the delegation were slowly coming up the gallery. Julia Tremaine had opened the long window and gone out on to the gallery. Leavitt came up to the group.

"We wanted to send for you, Malvern, to tell you what Julia has just told us."

He handed Malvern David's letter, which Malvern took and read once and again with absorption. Leavitt's eyes did not leave his face. He put his hand on Malvern's shoulder and shook him lightly :

"There doesn't seem any reason, Redmond, does there, why *Big Tremaine* should not run for Congress?"

"Good God!" cried Malvern, his voice shaking with emotion. He looked from John's mother to John, with the letter in his hand. He put out both hands to John. "Give me your hand. I couldn't have done a thing like this, Tremaine. I beg your pardon."

Some one started the cry: "John Tremaine." It was taken up. Coming as it did from several hundred throats, the cry was deafening. Malvern was wringing John's hand.

"I'll go out and speak to them, John. I'll say a few words first. Then you come."

He went hatless out on to the gallery and there addressed the delegation from the steps. His voice was clear and ringing. He called out a short, concise, and telling message to the crowd, just the right words from a man who knew how to speak to his fellow citizens. He was interrupted by cheers, and called back into the house:

"Tremaine! Tremaine!"

John, still in something of a daze, went slowly out from the room, which for years had been the setting of his life's drama and the environment surrounding him in many moments of mental anguish and in fleeting moments of joy.

On the gallery he stood between Malvern and several men to whom he was hastily presented and looked out over the crowding mass of the people from his State.

The light of noon shone over the crowd, as they seethed up from the gates of the property to the very door. They were the usual heterogeneous lot, gathered

along the way, from Craig's Corners down to Redlands, taking strength from the villages along the river. There were citizens of Redlands; there were his own workmen; there were some of the miners. There were white people and colored people with banners floating above them. A big banner flashed its red and white message before his eyes: "Tremaine for Congress!" and John heard them call the name which within the last half hour had been washed clean. He heard them cry: "Speech! Speech!" Malvern at his side urged him.

No one knew how John had wanted just this thing, and how his ambitions had all pointed toward this—to be the man of the moment among his own people, chosen by them—but for a second he could not find his voice.

Malvern seemed to understand that the candidate was not quite ready to address the crowd. Some one gave a sign, and the colored band fell into the tune that had so linked John with Virginia. They began to play:

" Hard times, hard times,
Come again no mo' . . . "

It was the note needed to unlock his heart. When the music ceased, and Malvern with the others called: "Speech! Speech!" John was ready.

He heard how they cheered him, how his name rang out. He was conscious that they swept away as they had swept in, like a dark, receding sea. They were going out of the gates. He had spoken something to

them; it had been short and to the purpose. He never knew what he had said. When he glanced at it the next day in the papers, he thought it must have been the words of another man. They were going out and away. The delegates were the last to leave, one by one, loitering down the steps, following the edge of the crowd. Eventually even Malvern had disappeared somewhere.

John Tremaine stood alone, leaning against the pillar of the gallery. Before him the grass was torn up by the feet of the people, and scattered here and there were the remnants of the hand-bills; even a stray banner trampled under foot lay upon the lawn. The last note of the band died away in the distance, the echoes of the voices became indistinct, and John came slowly to his senses and realized that at the moment of his apotheosis he stood alone. He turned, and standing in the doorway in her riding-dress, holding in her hand one of the banners marked "Tremaine for Congress," was Isobel Malvern.

They looked at each other across the gallery. Then, by the same inspiration, they came toward each other. Isobel held out both her hands to him.

"Oh, I knew you would take the nomination! I knew it! Wasn't it wonderful? Wasn't it wonderful?"

He felt her clinging to him, and he heard her say in a voice broken by excitement, speaking as it were against time, against the overmastering feeling which she knew was in his heart for her:

"You didn't know I was there, did you? I heard your beautiful speech. You didn't know that I led a little body of the Craig's Corners people myself, did you? I rode before them. I was so proud. I carried your banner—Big Tremaine! Oh, John Tremaine! John Tremaine!"

It seemed to him that his name had never been spoken before. He lifted her face to his, between both his hands, and bent down and kissed her.

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